



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

ERRE • NUMBER 034 • 1st SESSION • 42nd PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Friday, September 30, 2016

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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1510)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): Welcome to the 34th meeting of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform.

I would like to acknowledge that we are on the traditional lands of the Dene people. It's a great pleasure to be here. It's my second trip ever to Yellowknife. I notice that it has changed significantly in the last 20 years. Am I mistaken? It has. There is new construction, and the like. Yellowknife is looking great.

Our first panel includes Mr. Louis Sebert, Minister of Justice here in the Northwest Territories. He is appearing as an individual, I believe. We also have Mr. Dennis Bevington, a former colleague. We've travelled with committees together. Actually, we sat together on the public safety committee for about four years. It's very nice to see you again, Dennis, on your home turf here.

We'll start with Mr. Sebert, for 10 minutes, followed by Mr. Bevington, for 10 minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. Sebert.

Hon. Louis Sebert (As an Individual): Thank you to the special committee for inviting me here today. Welcome to the Northwest Territories, and welcome to this new hotel.

I am the Minister of Justice, Attorney General, Minister of Lands, Minister Responsible for the Northwest Territories Power Corporation, and most interestingly, Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency for the Government of the Northwest Territories. We have a very small cabinet, so we all have to have many roles.

I would like, first of all, to thank the committee for its work on electoral reform and express appreciation for the inclusion of the Northwest Territories in your travel as part of the consideration you are giving to federal electoral reform.

I expect that your experiences here will reinforce what you likely already appreciate. The Northwest Territories is a unique part of Canada, and any consideration of electoral reform should recognize these circumstances of our territory.

I hope to assist the committee by providing information on the particular context of our territory that might have bearing on the options for reform you will be weighing. My remarks here today are intended only to provide such background, and I should note that the

Government of the Northwest Territories is not taking a position on electoral reform.

The Northwest Territories is a vast territory with 33 communities spread over 1.4 million square kilometres. Our geography and our demographics bring special consideration to bear on the issues before you. I would like to focus my remarks on a few of these considerations, with the first of those being the need for plain language.

Approximately 25% of our population does not have a high school diploma. Outside of the four largest communities, this number climbs to 32.2%. Any changes made to the existing electoral system will need to have a clear plain language communication plan to explain the new process or it risks disenfranchising voters.

Radio and print media remain staples for information to communities. Social media, particularly Facebook, is used by younger people throughout the territories.

With respect to the lower rate of home Internet access, 79% of households in the Northwest Territories have Internet access compared to 83% nationally. Outside of Yellowknife and the regional centres of Hay River, Inuvik, Fort Smith, Norman Wells, and Fort Simpson, this number drops drastically. Outside of metropolitan areas, nationally, 75% have Internet access. Of our 33 communities, 13 have less than 50% household Internet access.

In our smallest communities, the percentage of households without Internet access ranges from 17.5% to 66.7%. Many of these small communities are reliant on satellite Internet, which can be interrupted. Should this happen on election day, entire communities could be disenfranchised.

Only 72% of the NWT residents have photo ID; however, once Yellowknife is removed from the equation, where 82% of residents have photo identification, the numbers change drastically. One community has as low as 3% of its residents who have government-issued identification. In total, the majority of residents in 20 of 33 communities have no photo identification.

Previously, the chief electoral officer of the Northwest Territories presented to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in March 2014 regarding proposed amendments to the Canada Elections Act. He specifically requested that amendments removing vouching be deleted. For every 1,000 votes cast in the 2011 territorial election, 15 electors required another elector to vouch for them to establish their identity and place of residence.

I should note that while Canada restricted the use of vouching, the Northwest Territories expanded it. In the 2015 territorial election, electors were able to vouch for up to five other electors, which is up from one elector previously. Although the numbers are not yet available, I note that the number of votes cast in the 2015 election increased over the 2011 election by 873 despite no corresponding increase in population.

On mandatory voting, the Northwest Territories has had a traditionally low voter turnout in federal elections, reaching a high of 63.36% in the 2015 election, which is up from 53.95% in the 2011 election, and 47.71% in 2008. Territorially, voter turnout in 2015 was 44%, although our chief electoral officer has noted that the total number of votes cast in 2015 is higher than in 2011 despite no population growth, which indicates there may be issues with the voters list.

However, low voter turnout for territorial elections is a relatively new phenomenon, as turnout in 2007 was 67%, 68% in 2003, and 70% in 1999. Prior to the division of Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, turnout was in the mid to high seventies.

On mandatory voting, I would be concerned with any proposed penalties for not voting.

While Yellowknife skews the average wage for the territory in any national reporting, according to Statistics Canada, the NWT has the highest average weekly wage earnings in Canada, at \$1,421.46. This is true of Yellowknife and the largest communities. I note, according to the NWT Bureau of Statistics, that in 2015 the average salary in Inuvik was \$130,340. In Paulatuk, a community not far away, the average annual salary was \$6,005.

Financial penalties for not voting would fall most harshly on those residents already struggling with the day-to-day reality of being unemployed or underemployed with no economic prospects, a far higher cost of living, and heavy reliance on government programs.

Finally, I'll conclude with the request that whatever the committee recommends to Parliament, you ensure accessibility to resources and systems of voting equitable for all residents.

Thank you.

• (1515)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sebert.

We don't have translation, unfortunately.

[Technical difficulty—Editor]

Game on. We'll take it from the top.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (As an Individual): I was invited to come here and speak, and I was very pleased to have the opportunity to do so. I live in a little town called Fort Smith, which is due south of here. Certainly it's a pleasure to be here with you.

I'd like to, first of all, share a bit of my experience as a member of Parliament. Ultimately, when we vote for someone, what we expect to happen is that the member of Parliament will provide a service to us.

I spent 10 years in opposition in Parliament. As the member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories, I often felt that the

government would bypass me in its dealings. That's a problem for many members of Parliament. We are elected by the people to represent the people. I think it's quite important that respect be given to members of Parliament, and that in the electoral reform we do everything we can to ensure that the roles of members of Parliament are enhanced rather than taken away. Quite clearly, over a period of years, the importance of members of Parliament has declined in the eyes of the governing party, regardless of which party that is.

I have had some unique experiences as a member of the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, where I sat with many other parliamentarians from countries around the northern circumference. Most of those parliamentarians were part of a proportional representation system.

Interestingly enough, in Sweden parliamentarians do not sit in parties; they sit together with the other people from their regions. You would have a Conservative and a Social Democratic sitting side by side, and when they would speak, it would be from the front to the whole group.

There are different ways of conducting business as parliamentarians that we need to consider, as well. It's so important that there's a relationship that can work between all people who are elected to Parliament. That's why, in a way, I support proportional representation. We're going to create a situation where there's a necessity to work with members of Parliament.

Under proportional representation, most likely you're going to have a situation where not one party controls Parliament at all times. There will be more minority governments. There will be more need for coalitions. There will be more need for working together, understanding each other better, and respecting each other as representatives of the people.

I think that's the end result you will get from proportional representation. If you look around at the countries that do have this system, many of them in situations similar to ours, first world countries that have experience in democracy, those situations occur.

One time I met with a Danish energy minister on climate change issues. He said that there was no way that they could have created an energy policy like they have without the full support of all the parties. This was a conservative minister of energy. It was quite clear that the system they have, where there is more need to work together, produces results in a very complex world that requires not single-minded solutions.

Here in Canada we play politics like hockey: there's only one winner. That attitude has to change. Minority Parliaments are better. Minority Parliaments place more emphasis on the average MP. That's been my experience in both majority and minority Parliaments. In your time in Parliament, I think you'll find the same.

Another thing I have to say is that Canada is a colonial state. When I came from the Northwest Territories, I had thought I lived in a colonial part of Canada, until I went to Ottawa and realized that we're hidebound by what had been set out for us by the British Empire almost 150 years ago.

•(1520)

We need to become our own country, with systems that represent this diverse, far-flung body. We can't continue to try to run as a first-past-the-post political system. It's not working for us.

We certainly don't want to fall into the American model, which we can see continually works toward this very disadvantageous situation for the American people.

I am supportive of proportional representation. Of course, as a northerner, I want a mixed proportional representation because, coming from a region that has 40,000 people, I realize we are not going to get a lot more members of Parliament out of here, regardless. We need to keep our member of Parliament representing this huge area. So does Yukon, and so does Nunavut.

These areas are very important at the federal level, because so much of the power for the control of land and resources still resides within Ottawa. That may change, but as it stands now, many of those powers still reside there.

Indigenous interests are inseparable from the three territories, and I would say for many other regions in Canada now, and they need to have proper representation.

One thing I have to say is that there was common interest among northern MPs, whether they came from northern Manitoba, northern Ontario, northern Quebec, northern Saskatchewan, or the three territories, and any riding that actually represented indigenous people. There was a common bond there that I found over the 10 years I was there. There were common issues. There were things that came out that made us work together, regardless of our political stripe.

When we come to proportional representation, the system, even if it's mixed proportional, will have lists that political parties will assign their choices to. I think it's very important that you consider how to control those lists. Those lists have to recognize the regionality of this country, if you are going to go in that direction. This is true in other countries. I've seen it. In the way the political parties set up their lists, you have to take into account regionality, and you have to respect what the country is.

If you are considering a change to the system, and you are considering proportional representation, there are more things to be taken into account about how it's done.

I actually believe that the northern regions and indigenous people have similar interests. If you are going to go to a proportional representation system, I think that if you look at Canada as a whole and put the northern and the indigenous ridings together, you would have a population base that's large enough to assign proportionality to that group.

That's the major point I am trying to make here. Look at the north in terms of its common interests, rather than the political boundaries, because that's the only way the northerners will get larger and better representation in the House of Commons. Northerners and indigenous people need more representation there. Their issues are at the table in Parliament to a greater extent than those of other parts of this country.

What you are doing is important, and I'm very glad that you are here in the north and visiting the different communities to understand what we need from the changes you're going to make.

Thank you very much.

•(1525)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bevington.

We'll go to our—

[*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

I'll just give you an overview of how the Q and A period functions. Each member of the committee has an opportunity to engage with the witnesses for five minutes, and that includes, of course, the questions and the answers.

•(1530)

We'll start with Ms. Romanado, for five minutes, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): I'd like to thank our panellists and the members of the audience for being here today. Thank you for coming out.

What's great about this committee is that we are able to go coast to coast to meet people. Unfortunately the schedule is a little tight so we won't have a lot of time to visit and see the sights, but we did get to see it from the cab from the airport to here. I got to see a little.

I'll start with Mr. Sebert. You brought something new to this table that we hadn't heard before about reaching folks here in the Northwest Territories. You talked a little about radio and print media being staples for reaching out to folks, which we didn't hear in the rest of Canada. We always hear about social media. We hear about using the Internet. You've given us some pretty important information regarding the stability of broadband here in the Northwest Territories.

You also touched on the lack of photo ID, which I was not aware of, and the importance of vouching. When we talk about accessibility for folks who would like to be part of the democratic process, knowing the unique challenges that are faced here in the north, it's important for us to hear that, and I was not aware of it. Thank you for bringing that forward.

On vouching, you mentioned in provincial elections you allow folks to vouch for up to five people. Could you give us a sense of how the impact of the removal of the voting ID cards as a use of proof of address and changes to the Elections Act have impacted the ability of people to participate in elections? Could you elaborate a little on that?

Then I'll have a question for Mr. Bevington.

Hon. Louis Sebert: As I mentioned, fewer people up here have photo ID than probably anywhere else in Canada. We don't know what the vouching numbers were for the last election but speaking for my riding, I think they were pretty significant in my small town. Like Mr. Bevington, I also come from Fort Smith. As I mentioned, in the 2011 election, for every 1,000 ballots cast, 50 were by electors who were vouched for by another person. It's not a huge number but it's pretty significant, and we haven't received the statistics yet for this past election but I would expect they would be as significant.

I should add also that the vouching was twice as likely to take place outside of Yellowknife in the small communities as in Yellowknife. It was utilized far more in the small communities where there's less ID than it is in Yellowknife.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Mr. Bevington, I didn't have the pleasure of working with you as I'm a newbie on the Hill but thank you for your service to Canada.

You mentioned you were supportive of mixed proportional representation and of course in the north with the riding really being one big riding with one representative. What would your preference be in rural-urban? Would you recommend that the three territories remain with first past the post and the rest of Canada go with proportional? I'd like you to elaborate a little on your thoughts. Then could you also elaborate on your thoughts on the lists for the proportional seats? Would those be closed lists or open lists?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I think that for us not to be involved in mixed member proportional would make us second-class citizens under voting. I don't think that should happen. I think there has to be a way that we can... Obviously, have a member of Parliament elected from each of the territories because that's an essential thing in Ottawa. But there has to be a way that northerners, and I spoke to that, can look at the north as a region rather than as jurisdictions. You can include places like northern Manitoba, northern Saskatchewan, the other parts of the provinces that have similar interests.

Why is it that when we look at the making of mixed member proportional representation we can only think of it in terms of provinces and territories? Can we think of it in terms of regions of interest and have rules that would make that possible? There are so many common interests among the northern people of Canada. As I mentioned earlier, we live in similar worlds across the country.

• (1535)

The Chair: Thanks very much.

We'll go now to Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): Dennis, I want to start by asking you a couple of things, first of all by saying how nice it is to see you again. You look—I've noticed this with a number of my former colleagues who have left political life—better rested, less kind of pasty than those of us who stayed on. At any rate, it is good to see you and to listen to what you had to say.

I have a very strong sense...I have no particular expertise about the north, but I am a historian so I'm aware of the fact that much of what is now northern Manitoba, northern Ontario, northern Quebec, was actually part of what was then a much larger Northwest Territories, and was given to the provinces often, or perhaps always, without much regard for the people who were actually living there. For

example, the Inuit in northern Quebec share a language and a culture with people who are in Nunavut. I'm positive that when that land was transferred to Quebec in 1912, that was not taken into account. I'm guessing a similar history applies to these other areas, so I have a lot of sympathy for what you're saying about the commonalities of interest.

I suspect there is a constitutional barrier that makes it impossible to have votes in one province—I'm saying province, not territory here—affect representation in another. I suspect the courts would not permit that. But I do think it would be possible—I'm not recommending this; I'm more asking for your opinion on this because it actually came up when we were in Whitehorse—to consider the idea of having some kind of joint representation across the territories. Territories are not baked into the Constitution the same way that provinces are.

An idea that was discussed there, not conclusively of course, was the idea that you could have all three territories having some kind of system that allows for a degree of proportionality among their federal MPs. You obviously need to have more than one MP to have some kind of degree of proportionality, and this would be a way of achieving it.

What you lose, of course, is that while there are common interests, there are also some obvious distinctions. You have three separate governments all working with Ottawa and doing their own domestic legislation, and the linguistic and cultural makeup of the territories have some differences as well.

May I throw out that idea that was tossed around when we were in Whitehorse, and ask what you think of that idea?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, I go back to what I said about this being a colonial state, and constitutionality versus practicality. We accepted the British system 150 years ago. Is it the system that we should have accepted? No. Maybe at that time that was a good idea because we didn't know anything else, but now we know differently. We know this country is different from Britain, and it will require different solutions to provide the answers.

I would say there's going to have to be some head knocking here on this whole issue of mixed proportional representation, and we need to throw everything on the table if we want to understand how the system can work. It has to be done in an open fashion, so I applaud this committee.

As a committee, I would encourage you to take a look at solutions that work for Canada, because we're not going to do this again for a long time. If you do make a change to the electoral system, it's not going to be an ongoing change. It's going to be a chance to do something properly here. Whatever it requires to do that, let's do it.

There was talk about having indigenous voters vote for representatives across the country at one time. I know that was an NDP position, that we provide indigenous seats in the House of Commons, because we knew how important and how necessary it was for that group in our society to have better representation. Can we provide it in a good fashion through mixed proportional representation in the rules we lay out for the political parties, once you move out of how the political parties are bound by the Constitution when they create the lists of people who are going to be appointed once they go through the process of voting in the system?

The political parties are the ones that are going to actually decide who gets to sit in Parliament for the mixed proportional representation, so I don't think that part is constitutional.

• (1540)

The Chair: Thanks. Your time is up.

We'll go to Mr. Boulерice.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Messrs. Dunbar, Sebert and Bevington, thank you for being here with us today.

We saw some beautiful landscapes as we landed in Yellowknife, not just from the taxi. I am very pleased to be setting foot in Yellowknife for the first time.

The committee has been sitting for some time now. We sat this summer, and we have been touring for nearly two weeks now. As Mr. Bevington said, we have an important and historic mandate to study a new voting system pursuant to the Liberal government's promise that 2015 will be the last year for the present one.

Mr. Bevington, you advocated the mixed-member proportional position. I find it very interesting that you discussed your relations with parliamentarians from the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region, Denmark, Sweden and other countries that have been using that system for decades. Where I come from, a coalition is often presented as a sin that you should not commit, a kind of bogeyman, whereas it is normal for most western democracies. It is normal to discuss issues, form a consensus, and find solutions.

Arend Lijphart, the American academic, also said that switching from simple-plurality voting to the proportional system changed the political culture. You suggested that the role of members should be increased in parliaments, not decreased. The current system tends to reduce the role of individual MPs.

In Edmonton yesterday, Mr. Green told us this:

[*English*]

“As far as I'm concerned, we are not electing trained seals”.

[*Translation*]

However, sometimes you would think that is the case.

I would like to know what you think a proportional voting system might change in Canadian political culture at the federal level and in the role of MPs as representatives of their communities.

[*English*]

The Chair: Before you answer, Mr. Bevington, I would remind the audience that there are simultaneous interpretation devices on that table. If you would like to take one, feel free.

Go ahead, Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It was a wonderful experience working with other parliamentarians from other systems, because one understood that our system doesn't have to be this way. It doesn't have to be the way we have it. We have a choice, and that's the exciting thing. We have a choice that we can make.

I've sat through both minority and majority governments, and it's quite clear that minority governments gave more responsibility and more practical authority to individual MPs. I mean, we had many votes that were pretty close, and those were times when things were good. On committees, it made an incredible difference to have a balance. I felt we had more issues that were of importance on committees during the times when we had minority governments. The members of Parliament on committees had more opportunity to put forward their positions than at any other time in Parliament.

There are things that can change. I feel that proportional representation, in its nature, will increase the role of members of Parliament. I would ask you to consult with other MPs who have gone through this process. I know your chair here has experienced all manner of political set-ups. He's been in majority and minority governments, so there you go.

I appeal to the knowledge of all MPs on this particular item, but I do feel it will be good.

• (1545)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: Thank you, Mr. Bevington.

We are trying to find a genuinely Canadian solution. The geography of the federation—the circumstances of the north with its small population and very large area—creates special situations. The Danish, Dutch, and Irish system cannot be applied to Canada; it will not work.

We have often heard Mr. Kingsley say we can have a hybrid system. Mr. Bevington, you say that, no, we do not want to be in a separate class; we want to be included in the proportional system. How do we go about doing that? Can we elect two MPs per district? Can we elect one or two more as "super northern" members for the three territories, or do we assign those additional members to northern Saskatchewan, northern Quebec and northern Ontario? That may be the only place where we would add members if we changed systems.

[*English*]

The Chair: Go ahead, and please be brief.

The question is for Mr. Sebert.

Hon. Louis Sebert: Although I'm identified as appearing as an individual today, my invitation is as a justice minister, so I'm a little constrained about sending forth my own personal views on these matters. I do want to say, however, that if there are any changes, they have to be in very plain language and absolutely clear to the voters. As I mentioned previously, our education levels are probably not as high as they are in other parts of Canada, so explaining a complex system may be difficult in the Northwest Territories. I would therefore tend to think that complexity is bad, and that we'd prefer a simple system. That doesn't mean we can't look at a new system, but I can't really give an opinion on what system my government would prefer. I don't have that mandate.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, gentlemen.

I apologize for being late and missing your presentations. I misread the agenda and was convinced the committee meeting was to start an hour later. I want to thank the clerk for her reminder. While you were making your presentations, I was busy walking the city streets and eating at Sushi North, the restaurant the interpretation team suggested to me. Thank you for that very good suggestion.

My questions are intended for Mr. Bevington more particularly, but Mr. Sebert may also answer them if he wishes.

Do you think the reform project should be prepared quickly, or should we push back the deadline to ensure it is well done? In other words, are we ready or would it be better to take more time? That is my first question.

Here is my second question. In British Columbia, a citizens assembly was established to study the issue carefully. Would it not be a good idea to explore this avenue at the federal level? I would also like to hear your views on the idea of reserving seats for the representatives of aboriginal people and Inuit First Nations?

• (1550)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

You are in a very tight time frame, so I think if you move ahead with this, this committee will have to work very hard to come up with the answers you're looking for. As you say, there will be some bigger issues with that. We've heard talk of constitutional issues. We know that people may or may not want to conduct a referendum. I think if you don't move ahead, though, in a timely fashion, you're going to lose the initiative to do this.

So I'd say that quite clearly the majority of Canadians voted for parties that promised them electoral reform and that there is an obligation on our part to work collectively to come up with some answers here. That's something that is a challenge to all MPs. In Canada it's a challenge to work together, and I see in other countries it's not as big a challenge. So we have to change what we're doing to work together. Part of what you can do here is to set an example of

working together to come up with solutions, as the majority of you promised the voters you would do.

For indigenous people, I absolutely believe that there has to be a way, and that's why I said the north and indigenous people have many similarities. In fact in the Northwest Territories, 50% of our population is indigenous. In Nunavut, it's 80% or 90% indigenous. In Yukon it's 20% or 25% indigenous. The northern regions of many provinces have a high degree of indigenous people in them. Those people have very similar interests. It's my opinion that this is an area of interest on which people could work together and that should be recognized. It's going to be difficult to give our three territories extra seats. This territory has 40,000 people, and we have a seat in Parliament. It's going to be very difficult to give us two seats in Parliament.

What about Atlantic Canada? Is there going to be regionality there? Are you going to throw the four provinces in Atlantic Canada together? Otherwise, Prince Edward Island isn't going to get much proportionality either. It has four seats for 100,000 people. So this is an issue not just for the north. It's an issue in Atlantic Canada, and I think you have to recognize that and realize that with the mixed proportionality, there need to be areas of regional interest, and the political parties have to be held responsible for making that distinction.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Did Mr. Sebert want to add anything?

[English]

Hon. Louis Sebert: Of course we do have one MP for a population of 43,000. The government hasn't taken any position on electoral reform of any kind, but my main concern would be to have a system that is not terribly complicated. If you were willing to give us more seats, I imagine I could speak for the government in agreeing to that, but not on too much more. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Ms. May.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): It's wonderful to be here. For me, it's a trip back to Yellowknife. I've been fortunate, over my life, to spend time here, in Hay River, in Inuvik, and throughout much of the territories.

People in Whitehorse, Yukon, told us that whatever we do, don't lump them together. Their northern and cultural identities are all different, territory to territory.

I will address most of my questions to you, Dennis, because we MPs have been on a crash course, starting with what I'd call summer school. We spent all summer in hearings listening to a lot of experts. Then we hit the road, and this is our 10th day on the road to hear from Canadians from all over. We're hearing from people who have designed their own systems, some with a lot of experience from other countries and others not.

I'll pick up on one thing that may be an assumption, Dennis, around your comment that if we go to proportionality, we're going to have lists. There are a couple of proposals before us that don't involve lists at all. There's one proposal in front of us that actually involves increasing representation for the three northern territories. I want to put them to you.

We've had a lot of proposals from people who said to look at the New Zealand experience. It's been over 40 years; I'm forgetting the exact date. I'm sure that Scott will remember how many years it has been that the Maori population has had four specific seats just for Maori representation in their Parliament. Now it's seven specific seats, but on top of that, with proportionality, there are additional Maori MPs elected.

We heard from a young man in Edmonton named Sean Graham, who developed a system called dual member proportional. His system got the attention of the Government of Prince Edward Island, and they've put it as one of the choices on their plebiscite. The essence of dual member proportional is that we would couple the ridings, and each joint riding would have two representatives. You would never have to increase the number of MPs. The first representative is elected the normal way; the second is elected proportionally. The only problem he looked at across the country was what to do with Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories? The solution is to add another seat there so they're not deprived of the opportunity for proportionality. That second seat would be based on how their party had done, and not just on how the person on the ballot had done.

I'm probably not explaining this adequately, but it does occur to me that we could defend a second seat for a very small population base if it were in the interest of ensuring better representation of indigenous people in Parliament. I'm thinking out loud, which is a dangerous thing to do on the record in a committee. If there were two seats each for Nunavut, the Northwest Territories, and Yukon, and if the second seat was both proportional and reserved for indigenous representation, I think that might be worth thinking about.

There's also a single transferable vote suggestion from Jean-Pierre Kingsley, where we would cluster all the ridings capable of being clustered. This generally means that rural and remote areas would keep first past the post voting, and proportionality would only be granted to those who live in ridings that can be clustered. You certainly suggested in your remarks, Dennis, that this would not be satisfactory to you, and that the benefits of proportionality should be extended to all.

Having given you a somewhat incoherent picture of a number of our options, I'd like to hear your thoughts on these ideas.

● (1555)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I have lived in the Northwest Territories all my life and I have had second-class political status the whole time. I don't want to see that continue for my grandchildren with any new system. That's totally unacceptable to me, and I think to many other people. I grew up being a second-class citizen in this country in terms of political rights. I want us to have the same political rights as every other Canadian.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but to clarify, when you say political rights, you're saying that if the vast

majority of Canadians are ensured that their vote is going to count and be effective through proportionality, you would not want to see the voters of the Northwest Territories deprived of that.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's correct.

As far as Yukon goes, well, that's great. If Parliament wants to give us extra seats, as a northerner, I'd say that's great, but as a member of Parliament for 10 years, I don't think that's going to happen. That might not even stand up in court. When you're a small population, there's enough trouble getting representation in the courts of Canada now. If you're going to double our representation, you're going to create another court situation, for sure. Somebody's going to definitely take that...and that makes us superior citizens.

I'd say to Yukon, "If you think you're unique, but you have to have your proportional representation with British Columbia, you have a lot more in common with us than with British Columbia."

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

Thank you, Mr. Bevington.

Now I will go to Mr. DeCourcey, for five minutes.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Thanks to all our presenters and to everybody who has joined us here today.

Mr. Bevington, I want to pick up right where you left off. I understand the argument of not becoming a second-tier citizen, because one part of the country would have a certain form of representation and the north would continue to have another. You preceded that by saying that you grew up as a second-class citizen and were treated as a second-class MP. Where does that sentiment derive from?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I grew up as a second-class citizen because all the political decisions that were made for my territory were being made in Ottawa. That wasn't the case for someone in Alberta, British Columbia, or Saskatchewan, or anywhere else in this country.

We've had a long battle to get what we need. I fought in Parliament just to get a borrowing limit removed from the Government of Northwest Territories so they could borrow money to do public projects. No other province has that problem. We're still very much beholden to the NWT act of Parliament, and that's the problem. We don't have the political freedom to vote for the people in our territory who can do the work that you do in other provinces.

Mr. Matt DeCourcey: Thanks very much.

That allows me to pivot from there to the idea you mentioned that it doesn't have to be this way. I would agree that it doesn't have to be this way, but there are certain elements of Canadian reality that create some stickiness when we think about where and how we would change the federal nature of the country, such as constitutional requirements for seat allocation. I don't have to get down into that.

There is a constitutional legitimacy that needs to be met as we put forward electoral reform, as well as the political legitimacy that is attached to this. Canadians need to feel as though any reform is legitimate in their eyes. You addressed this with Mr. Ste-Marie in terms of the idea of moving quickly versus having to take our time to ensure we do things properly.

I've been listening to a bit of your testimony. Correct me if I'm wrong, but it sounds like you would be okay with this being used as an opportunity to open up the Constitution and explore some dramatic changes for the country.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Well, that question would be for a constitutional adviser, and you should have that very quickly in this committee. You should meet with constitutional experts to see what you can propose that would escape the requirement for constitutional discussions. My advice to you on that matter would be to hear from those types of people.

I do think we can put rules on political parties, such that if you went to the list system they would be required to put people on the list in accordance with having to meet certain pre-conditions on the list. That would not be a constitutional issue. That would be a political issue. I think we would have the ability to govern the political parties in that respect. I could be wrong, but I would suggest to you that it is very important for you to talk to constitutional experts, and I'm certainly not one.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Neither am I. Thanks very much.

Minister Sebert, do you have any advice on that matter, either personal advice or that of your government?

•(1605)

Hon. Louis Sebert: I don't have any personal advice. Again, I'm somewhat constrained by my position in representing the government today. I think my only observation would be that you should probably move cautiously. I don't know whether you're planning to have a referendum or some other form of deciding this very important issue, but it's very important that you get it right.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: *Merci.* We'll now go to Mr. Deltell.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

[*Translation*]

Good evening, gentlemen.

Thank you very much for welcoming us here to your territory, particularly since I see you were actually born here; that makes you even more interesting. I would not say more useful on this issue, in that everyone is useful, but, yes, you will be very useful.

I could not help but smile a little when Ms. May, leader of the Green Party, cited New Zealand as an example a little earlier. New Zealand is an excellent model; three referenda were held there before its electoral system was changed. We should draw inspiration from that excellent model.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: I understood it, but I would argue with you.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: That's all right.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes, we have a referendum...the government 's trying to block. It's a very complicated story, so I won't get into it.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: At the end of the day, those who have the final word are the people. In a democracy, it's a good way to think.

Gentlemen, Mr. Bevington, you talk about exploring new ideas. That's great. You talk about a common point of view from people in the north, whatever the territory, riding, or province. As we said with Mr. DeCoursey, there may be some constitutional issues. That's one thing, but I would say, just for the fun of it, think of how we can deal with that.

Do you have any idea how many ridings we should have and how we can link all those provinces together?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Within the federal state, you must have had some discussions with whoever deals with the legal aspects of your mandate. I think you need to go there. You need to hear from the best people in the country about what Parliament can do to change the system. If you're going to go a certain distance, does that require a constitutional change? Then you have to make a decision. How far are we going and does this require the approval of people? Can we do this through polling? Can we make some kind of judgment?

These are complex issues that are going to require a lot of people. When you run into a very complex issue like this in politics, as Mr. Sebert alluded to, if you can't present it to people in a fashion that they understand, they're not going to vote for it.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I understand that we should take our time to explore. Also, if we make a decision, we should explain it in order to educate people.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes, you have to take your time, but you are in Parliament for four years. If you sincerely want to accomplish something, you'd better do it in the four-year period because you may not have the chance afterwards. That's the reality of politics in this country. Here we have a mandate and we have a special committee. This is a major step forward. You have to make an agreement. You have to have an understanding among people, absolutely. Can you accomplish that—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Do you think we can achieve something like what you have in mind? It's the first time we've heard what you suggested, and it's quite interesting. I don't judge it; I am just happy to see that there is a new way of thinking. I don't say I agree or disagree, but it's a brand new platform that you are suggesting to us, that is, having some ridings with two or three provinces involved. That's quite interesting.

Do you think we can achieve that in the next three years even though the Chief Electoral Officer said that it will take two full years just to make some changes? What you suggest to us is something even larger than that, so do you think we can achieve this in this mandate?

•(1610)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That is a challenge, I have to admit. It's a challenge to make any changes in Canada, but we have to accept that challenge. As long as you accept the challenge, if you can't do it in your mandate, then you set up a process that can carry on after this mandate is over. If Parliament can come to some kind of three-party, four-party, five-party agreement that says that this is where we're going, and we're going to complete this.... If you go into an election period where you say that everybody is onside here, that you all agree on this, and you agree that this should be done, then you can carry this process on.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: If you start squabbling before an election, then the process will get lost. The Danish energy minister said that to make changes in your country, you've got to have a consensus. To make sincere changes, you have to have this consensus.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): I appreciate, Mr. Bevington, everything that you're saying. You come from a place of awesome experience in the system. We are sitting in the committee, looking at how we can work together to accomplish this. You're correct that a promise has been made, and this committee is trying to take it very seriously and figure out a method in which we can present something to the Canadian people that they'll be happy and satisfied with.

We'll be hearing from a lot of the public afterwards in the open-mike session, but I think you'll have probably a good sense of what people are thinking, having campaigned and door-knocked and been in the political sphere for a very long time. We often hear people say their vote doesn't count and that's why they want a change, or that their political views belong to none of the big parties and therefore they're not represented in the system, things like that. Did you often hear those types of complaints at the door and hear the desire for a different system? If so, what type of change did they want to see implemented?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: The most common was that they wanted us to work together. Canadians are very much like that. They want to see people working together. That was the most common talk I heard at the door. Of course, you have a variety of points of view. Some people love the fact that we hammer away at each other. But most people want us to work together. Most people want Parliament to be functioning in a good fashion. As I said before, we often treat it like a hockey game: we're on either side of the ice, we're battling and scrapping, and the winner takes all. That's not the way we should be doing business in this country. It's not a hockey game.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I understand you were saying that it was your perspective as well. How often does that occur at the doorstep?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It occurs quite often. If you talked about Parliament, that was the major thing, "Why can't these guys work together?"

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Minister Sebert, you mentioned that whatever change we make you would suggest that it be simple and that it would be bad if it was complex. I know it's difficult for you to make

specific suggestions, but is there something you could tell us to avoid doing because it would be too complex?

Hon. Louis Sebert: The Parliament of Canada might have some experience with having clear questions on a referendum. If it comes to that, I would suggest that there be a lot of advertising in advance. I mentioned earlier that a lot of people here still rely on the traditional press, the newspapers and the radio. I know all of us at the assembly listen very faithfully to the CBC each morning, concerned that our names will come up in some unfortunate circumstances.

If it does go to a referendum—I have no idea whether that's what you're proposing—I think it would take a lot of work to have a referendum that people could easily understand. I don't know whether you would present a menu of possibilities or a simple yes or no. I don't envy you your task.

To give you a bit more information about our system here, we don't have parties at the assembly. It's a consensus type of government. When the 19 were elected, then seven were selected as cabinet ministers, so to some degree we're always in a minority government. When I went door to door in my election last November, I heard that they wanted us to work together, the same thing that Mr. Bevington heard in the federal election. I think to some degree our system, a small territory, works very well in that we in the cabinet always need some members from the opposite side.

To repeat, if it does come to a referendum, I don't envy you in your attempts to make it simple enough for people to understand.

•(1615)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: There's one more thing I wanted to address. Yesterday, we heard a lot about this issue being a minority rights issue. They were trying to suggest that the political view was a minority view, and that therefore this was a minority rights issue and we couldn't put it to a referendum.

Given that you are the Minister of Justice for the Northwest Territories, I think it's appropriate to ask you if you feel that this is a minority rights issue and should not be put to a referendum.

Hon. Louis Sebert: I'm going to be very cautious in answering that question. It's not my area of legal expertise, but if there is a referendum, I guess you have to decide what would constitute a clear question and what would constitute a clear majority. I understand that some of the referendums that have taken place required a larger than 50% vote. I can't give any constitutional legal issue at this point, but again I—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do you see the voting system as being a minority rights issue?

Hon. Louis Sebert: No, I really don't.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madam Jolibois.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Hello everyone. I'm glad to be here today with the group.

My question goes back to what Ruby's talking about. We in the north—I say “we” because my riding is in northern Saskatchewan. We have similar issues to what you have here. We have the language issue, the accessibility to Internet issue, issues with other services from health care to education, and other pieces. The distances are great.

I want to spend some time on the language piece. What does Northwest Territories do in terms of language? How many languages are there? Are they recognized? Are they official languages?

Hon. Louis Sebert: There are 11 official languages. We don't have interpretation in the assembly each day for those languages, but when someone wishes to present or speak in a language—English, French, whatever—they certainly can have interpreters there.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Okay.

Mr. Bevington, you alluded to it earlier and I can understand what you said in terms of feeling like a second-class citizen. Where I come from, we feel that way the majority of the time because of the complexities we have in northern Saskatchewan.

As parliamentarians of Canada, we are Canadians first. That's what I heard yesterday and as we started today. How do we acknowledge the first nations and the Métis? How do we make sure that we protect what we have?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Both in Parliament and in a personal way, I have always supported the development of political rights for indigenous peoples. Without that, it fits in with that colonial state. We have to recognize it. Our courts recognize it. There's so much need to move ahead with all aspects of settling land claims, recognizing culture, and dealing with the injustices of the past.

Those are all issues that we can work on here, and part of it comes from better representation in the House of Commons. I hope that's what will come out of this issue. I hope that the committee recognizes that one of the injustices of Canada that we need to fix is what happened to indigenous people who owned this land at one time and still have rights that go back for thousands of years.

What can you do to fix those issues through the electoral reform? I see a body of common interest across the country. I've suggested what I have because I know that in reality, in Parliament that's generally what happens. We can work together with people from the north because we do have those common interests. We do have citizens that need our joint efforts to get something done.

We can get beyond this party thing, which I see differently in other countries. Yes, they are in different parties, but they know darn well that they come from the regions and that the regions very much have a common interest. That's something that I hope you will actually get with proportional representation.

For many years there was only one representative from Alberta. That made the Alberta representation wrong because it didn't make the interests fit together, so you had a balancing act in Parliament from Alberta. I'm sure it was the same thing when there were 100 Liberals from Ontario. It made it very difficult for everyone to work together because that balance was lost. Whatever you can do to restore balance in Parliament through this process I think will help immeasurably.

• (1620)

The Chair: The time is up.

Thank you, Ms. Jolibois and Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Thank you to everybody for attending today.

Mr. Sebert, thank you very much for your remarks. I found them to be very helpful and instructive in helping us understand the challenges of the territories. That's very helpful.

I'm going to address most of my remarks to many of the things that Mr. Bevington has raised in his remarks.

If I heard you correctly, in your opening statement you characterized the current voting system as bad because it is a colonial inheritance. A colonial inheritance, even if something were such, is not a value proposition. Many things and ideas of how our society should look and what it should aspire to have very ancient roots. The idea that the crown can't seize property is an old idea. We're not going to abandon that because the Magna Carta is 801 years old. Tolerance and freedom of conscience, and the pluralism that has flowed from that, we're not going to abandon simply because it's a legacy of the Enlightenment from hundreds of years ago.

We have to really decide what's the best system on the merits of a system and not just throw out... We've heard it not just in the testimony we've heard today, but we've heard repeatedly from a variety of speakers that if the current system is old, then we have to get a new one. I reject that as a reason to abandon a system. If the system is not serving present needs, that is a different matter, and we should be wise to not forget that.

Mr. Bevington, many things that you did raise as difficulties and obstacles to effective government, and things that Canadians raise quite frequently, about frustration over rigid party discipline, or the perhaps disproportionate power of a prime minister's office, and the erosion of the individual role and powers of the member of Parliament, these are things that are very important, but perhaps can't and shouldn't be expected to be simply solved with a change in the way a voting system works.

Party discipline and the accountability of a cabinet and a prime minister to Parliament have changed throughout, even under the current system, and for better or worse. There was a time when a government was, on a day-to-day basis, very much aware of its accountability to its own Parliament, not to its party membership, because it was the Parliament itself, not the members of a political party, that chose a party leader. These are all issues that have come about and changed within a system, and perhaps they're not going to be solved overnight by moving to another one.

You had mentioned the need for consensus, and the importance of consensus, the desirability of consensus among our committee, and among parliamentarians, and indeed among Canadians. Yet we have heard from both experts and from [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]

•(1625)

I'll wrap up quickly. I've probably burnt all my time and I don't know if we'll get to a question or if this is just going to be a statement.

Mr. Bevington and indeed others who have spoken before us have talked about not only the desirability of consensus but the need for consensus. We've had discussion about what would constitute the legitimacy necessary to change a voting system. We've been told by many people who advocate a proportional representation system that it's necessary, but in the same breath they say we shouldn't put it to a referendum, because it would likely fail. We've heard that a referendum is simply a way to prevent change from happening.

I would reject that notion with due regard and understanding of the importance of getting a question correct, and having a good debate, a robust and fair and civil debate, but indeed, I don't know what legitimacy would look like in the absence of a referendum. I am also bothered by the assertion that maintaining the current system is unfair and unjust because it's an unjust system, but that we should use the power of that unfair system to impose something without a referendum.

The Chair: That's a good conclusion. We'll leave it at that.

We'll go now to Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): It's a pleasure to be back in the NWT. I had the privilege of living in Fort Smith for five years back in Dennis's day as mayor, and as I sit here on a Friday night, north of 60, I just have to give a nod to the Roaring Rapids Hall and hope we can maybe have some Yellowknife experiences this evening when we're all done here.

Anyway, it's great to see both of you today.

Mr. Sebert, I wanted to talk a bit about voter turnout. You mentioned the lower rates of participation in the NWT amongst voters. Are there any discussions under way about increasing voter participation or turnout, and if so, is it a concern? Are you looking at trying to increase it in the future, and what might that look like?

•(1630)

Hon. Louis Sebert: I can say that it has been a concern in that we appear to be going in the wrong direction. In the last few elections, there has been less of a turnout than there had been previously. When I first ran for election a long, long time ago in my community of Fort Smith, there was a turnout of over 90%, of which I garnered 4%.

We are concerned about it. I think a bit of the downturn in numbers this last time might have been due to voter fatigue, because there was not only, of course, the federal election on October 19 but also municipal elections in many of our communities on the same day. We are concerned about it and we're trying to get out to make the voting easier. We just had a report from our chief electoral officer. We're looking at that. We're looking even at electronic voting, as a possibility, and yes, it is a concern. We hope to address that concern.

There's one other thing. The territorial election, because of your election, was later in the year, and the weather on November 23 was not terribly pleasant in a lot of ridings, and that may well have kept numbers down. We want to turn that around and have as many

people out as possible. The committee is presently reviewing the chief electoral officer's report and we are looking at changes.

Thank you.

Mr. John Aldag: I don't know if the report is public, but taking a look at the chief electoral officer's comments would help us understand the challenges of the territories.

Hon. Louis Sebert: That report is public. It was tabled in the House.

Mr. John Aldag: I want to ask you about another thing. You're one of two governments in Canada that work on a consensus basis. When I left here, I found that absolutely fascinating, and although the national system is quite different, with the political parties and how we're set up, this idea of moving to something that may bring about more collaboration.... Could you share your thoughts, sitting in a coalition-based government, about the strengths, the weaknesses, and the things we could either anticipate or look forward to if we moved away from the kind of opposition we've heard from Mr. Bevington? I think being part of a coalition government would be quite interesting for our group to hear about.

Hon. Louis Sebert: Yes.

We have had this system of consensus government for many years. It's always evolving. Initially, before I ran and before I was elected, I thought that a party system would actually be better. Then we could be bound to some of the promises we made on election day or before election day. But since I arrived in the House and was lucky enough to be selected for cabinet, I found it works very well. As I mentioned earlier, we are in a perpetual minority situation, as it were, so we do need help from the other side of the House.

Also, one of the things that we have decided to do in this assembly is to have a formal mid-term review. If that goes poorly, in essence we may have a change of some or all ministers. We also went through a long and exhaustive process at the beginning to set a mandate, so that the government will be measured against that mandate at the mid-term, which will be next year.

Mr. John Aldag: Do you find that things like spending, as being part of the executive.... How does that work? One of the things, whether it's true or just scare tactics in trying to get people away from a proportional representation system, it has been said that if you get into coalition governments, often compromises are made on spending, policy decisions, and those types of things. Is that your experience? Are you able to actually come up with agreement and decisions that truly reflect the best interests of the population you're serving?

Hon. Louis Sebert: Of course, we like to think that we do come up with decisions that are the best for the population. What I have found is there's always some back and forth with respect to spending issues. If there's clear and sensible opposition, we tend to make changes in budgets. Yes, we do hear from the regular members, and we do have meetings with them. Ultimately, we need to win at least some of them over, and often a compromise is made.

•(1635)

Mr. John Aldag: Great. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

This has been a very interesting discussion, especially given the way government works in the Northwest Territories. It's very interesting to hear your perspective on governing, Mr. Sebert, and to benefit from the fruit of your experience, Mr. Bevington, knocking on doors and hearing what the mood is with respect to how the country governs itself. Thank you very much, both of you, for being here.

We'll take a little break before we get going with our next panel.

• (1635)

(Pause)

• (1715)

The Chair: This opens our second panel.

We have with us Mr. Andrew Robinson from Alternatives North. We have as an individual Janaki Balakrishnan, and we have the co-chair from the Council of Canadians Northwest Territories Chapter, Ms. Lois Little.

Each individual will present for five minutes, and we'll do the round of questioning that you were witness to. I believe you were all in the audience for that last round so you have an idea of how things will function.

We'll start with Mr. Robinson for five minutes, please.

Mr. Andrew Robinson (Alternatives North): Since I only have five minutes, I will go quickly. Thanks for coming. It's nice to be here.

The Chair: Don't go too quickly. If you go too fast, the interpreters won't be able to keep up. Just a normal pace will be fine. I wouldn't worry too much about it.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: What I meant was I'll dispense with the long thank you and welcomes.

The Chair: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: The translators have a copy of my notes, so I'll mostly stick to those.

First I will acknowledge that we're on the traditional territory of the Dene people, Chief Drygeese territory.

I'll tell you a little bit about Alternatives North. It's a small non-profit. We're a social justice coalition with members from churches, labour unions, environmental organizations, women and family advocates, anti-poverty groups, and quite a few just individual citizens. We meet once a week to discuss what's going on in the territories.

Generally we operate under a consensus-based system, which means that we rarely need to vote on an issue. I think perhaps even when you look at your own lives, that's quite often the way you try to make decisions. Whether you're ordering pizza or running a business or whatever you're doing, you generally don't need to vote on every single thing. You find consensus by listening and accommodating different viewpoints until you get to where you're going.

It's interesting that Mr. Sebert was here from the territorial government, which also calls itself a consensus-based system of government. As he outlined, we elect members to that body, they then select a small number to be in the cabinet, and that cabinet stays

in a minority position all the time. This forces them to talk to all of the members, and they do. We think proportional representation would move the federal government in a similar direction, which would allow for more listening to a diversity of opinion. We would end up with more representative decisions being made.

That's the introduction. At Alternatives North we met as a whole group and came to a consensus on a position on electoral reform in the federal government. Alternatives North fully supports a strongly proportional system for Canada in general. This would be a system where every vote influences the outcome, and the seats in Parliament reflect the proportion of the vote that each party got.

We prefer that proportional representation be implemented without needing to change the Constitution, because we think that would take a huge effort, at least in the short term. Perhaps when you get to Senate reform, we might look at some other reformations as well.

For now we suggest that any of the systems proposed by Fair Vote Canada would be acceptable. We looked at a few of them, and we think the mixed member proportional system would be the easiest to explain to people. We looked at the Law Commission report of 2004, which makes a solid 600-page-long recommendation and case for mixed member proportional.

We also understand, and were surprised to discover, that proportional representation involves creating electoral regions that go within Canada. When you talk about proportional representation, you don't use the whole Canadian vote. You have these different regions, and these regions can't cross provincial boundaries. We also understand, although we're not experts, that the Canadian Constitution does not prevent them from crossing territorial boundaries, as was discussed earlier today.

As I think you heard in Yukon, the three individual territories are very attached to having their own representation, with at least one member each. We understand that any attempt to go towards a system where I think we would share three members would not be received very well. We understand that and we agree with the rest of the north on that.

We also understand that proportional representation would not be possible for the Northwest Territories if we had only one MP. That's kind of obvious. If there's only one, he'll represent only one party.

We propose a couple of things. One, we propose that there would be some degree of proportional representation in the NWT if we had at least two MPs. It's interesting; we also listened to what people were talking about in Yukon. It's a very Canadian thing almost, where the territories are saying, well, we've discovered that to do this, we're going to need two MPs. We really don't want to suggest that we need more MPs, but because this is the way it has to work, we suggest that we have two MPs. We understand that we have a low population and all those things, and we're not demanding more representation, but we see that for this to work on a fair basis, we're going to need two.

It could work either through a mixed member proportional system or through a single transferable vote system. The results wouldn't be as proportional as in the rest of Canada, because even with two MPs you might get your first and second choice, but it wouldn't be very easy for the third and fourth choices to get a seat. However, it's still better than nothing.

We also looked at what's being discussed a bit, the idea of combining the three northern territories with the additional MPs, so that Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut would each get to elect one MP directly, and then the remaining three could be pooled, and some form of proportional system could be used to select those three seats. It seems the best way to do that would be mixed member proportional, where there would be some form of a list, so you vote twice, once for your local MP and once for a party that would represent the whole north. Basically, that would probably work.

Finally, we also came across the dual member proportional system which I think you just heard about yesterday, which is a form of mixed member proportional, as we understand it. As far as I understand it, that seemed like the most elegant solution. I won't go into the details of it, but that would be a very simple ballot and that would also allow for a mixed member system to operate in the north.

To wrap it up, we really think that proportional representation in Canada is the key point. As Alternatives North, we would be willing to accept things that wouldn't work quite that well for the north, as long as we get it for Canada. Also, a single MP for the Northwest Territories is really important, and for the other two territories. The last remark is that it is interesting that our own Minister of Justice was saying we have to keep things simple and that people have trouble understanding different systems. Last fall, in Yellowknife, we had three elections in one month, and they were all under different systems.

The Chair: Yes, that's like the Scottish example. They have four systems: one for local, one for national, one for the U.K., and one for the European Parliament.

We'll go now to Ms. Balakrishnan, please, for five minutes.

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan (As an Individual): Good afternoon.

Thank you, Mr. Chair and respectable members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I consider this opportunity on the important initiative of improving Canadian democracy an honour and a privilege as a Canadian citizen.

My submission on electoral reform has provided the following: one, the personal background and experience that led me to make this submission; two, the reason for my support for proportional representation; three, my views on Northwest Territories and electoral reform; four, the method of proportional representation; and five, expectations in the implementation of electoral reform.

I came to Canada as an immigrant 35 years ago, at the age of 28. As a newcomer in the first few years, having less privilege to access connections and networks, I struggled for my well-being both financially and professionally. Later, during my 28 years of life in Ontario, I had the good fortune to come across a few political parties, and I learned about the democracy of Canada and the positions of various parties on different issues. Soon, I realized that taxes levied from the Canadian citizens are spent partly to sustain the democratic

system in Canada. Therefore, I looked upon Canadian politics as a way to improve my well-being. I freely used my voting rights as a Canadian citizen, choosing the best candidate who would represent me.

But more now than in the last two decades, election campaigns, in the name of strategic voting, are fearmongering, indicating who should not represent us more than who should. The last few days of campaigns are generally taken over by only two rival parties. This leads to voter confusion, panic, and frustration, and to unexpected losses for certain candidates and their supporters. This is a result of the current winner-take-all system and does not help to maintain integrity or to maintain Canadian democracy.

My connections and networks made me become an ardent supporter of Fair Vote Canada, which advocated to "make every vote count". The referendum on electoral reform in Ontario gave me an opportunity to learn about proportional representation through Fair Vote Canada in terms of how the number of votes gained by parties would be distributed in equal percentages to the number of seats. This gave me the confidence that, with my vote, I will not be deprived of electing a representative.

In the last four and a half years, I learned about the benefits of consensus-building governments in the north, based on issues and matters that impact the general population. With proportional representation, there will be continuity in the enactment of laws and the delivery of policy, and efficiency in resource management in serving the interests of the voter population and its affiliates.

As I understand it, any proposal for change in NWT needs to be processed through a duty to consult. My submission was as a witness taking this opportunity to express my views as an individual. NWT and other territories are represented by only one MP in each, and one political party at a time, regardless of what position the party holds in Parliament.

First, the implementation of proportional representation becomes impossible with only one representative. Second, in spite of the territories' makeup—almost two-fifths of the geographical extent of Canada—only three MPs represent the Government of Canada. The territories are not only underfunded, but also are very much under-represented. Elections Canada can provide for electoral distribution by geographical area as well.

In the 33 communities in NWT, with the lack of infrastructure and hardships due to harsh arctic weather conditions, a constituent and the representative may not meet each other in the entire term or sometimes may not even communicate. The all-party committee on electoral reform shall provide a way to be represented by members of all parties by increasing the number for representatives in the NWT to five. It would not be too much to expect, where 19 MLAs represent the government of NWT.

The prime motive of my witnessing is for an electoral reform with proportional representation, rather than for which PR system is applied. When in Ontario, I became familiar with the MMP system. Lately, through Fair Vote Canada's extensive efforts, I've learned of different systems and found that STV is also a good system. I do not support any system of closed list, which again deprives electors choice.

Any process implemented needs to be clearly understood by the participants, and the participants should respond with no biases. The subject matter behind any referendum is generally not simple. Many citizens are busy with their day-to-day matters and are unable to focus on such matters. Instead of putting the onus on voters, elected members should take responsibility for deciding on what is best for Canadians. The general public depends on non-profit organizations and advocacy groups that specialize in areas and advocate to the governments.

In the past, referenda on electoral reform in different provinces set the threshold much higher than 51%, deviating from regularly accepted democracy. This indirectly sends a message to the ordinary public that they were expected to vote on something undesirable. Therefore, my humble request as a responsible Canadian is that the special committee limit the electoral reform work to wide public consultations only, and not extend it to a referendum.

Once again, thank you, Mr. Chair and respectable members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, for having provided this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Balakrishnan, for your excellent testimony as someone who has learned so much and taken such an active interest in our democratic system. It's a great act of citizenship to do so.

We'll go now to Ms. Lois Little, please.

Ms. Lois Little (Co-Chair, The Council of Canadians-Northwest Territories Chapter): Good afternoon. Welcome to Yellowknife.

It's a privilege for us all to be here in Chief Drygeese territory in the Treaty 8 area.

I'm speaking here as a northern resident and also as co-chair of the NWT chapter of the Council of Canadians.

I want to focus my comments in the short time that I have on two areas. One is on representation, and the other is on the rule of law. These are the two principles that underpin our democracy.

On the principle of representation, I want to make it clear right off the top that I don't support the first-past-the-post system. There is no way that we should be living in the year 2016 and having millions of votes wasted in every federal election. It's no wonder that Statistics Canada reports tell us people are too busy to vote, that they don't think that politics matter, or they're not interested in politics, when their votes are wasted. It is clear that the current system has to change.

It's also pretty outrageous that we can have a party with 39% of the popular vote and likely about a quarter of the eligible voters in the country having control of the public policy agenda and making decisions for this country. If there is any way of saying to citizens

that they don't count, or sending the message that politicians don't care about us and they don't care whether we participate, the current system is the system that's sending that message. That's not something that we need to continue. It has to change.

I'm sure you all agree that representation is a fundamental principle of our democracy and that we must value every citizen and every region equally and we must end this false majority and the winner-take-all system.

I'm sure you've heard in your travels that every region is unique. The NWT is unique as well, and we need to see our uniqueness reflected in the House of Commons just the same as every other region needs to see its uniqueness reflected in the House of Commons. The best way for that to happen—and other folks have spoken to that—is with a proportional system. Given our experience here in the Northwest Territories and also the experience in Nunavut, we know a lot about picking people to represent us based on their knowledge, their skills, and their compassion, rather than a party with which they may or may not be affiliated. The mixed member proportional system offers a lot of opportunities for us to honour the traditions we have here in the north to really get good quality representation.

That's all I'll say at the moment about representation.

The other area I want to speak to is the rule of law, the other principle that is really fundamental to the health of our democracy.

As you well know, the Fair Elections Act was passed not so long ago. It is misnamed. It's anything but fair, and I will refer to it as the unfair elections act. I'm sure you know that the Council of Canadians launched a charter challenge with respect to the unfair elections act. Unfortunately it was unsuccessful, but on the good side, I'm happy that Justin Trudeau is committed to repealing that act. I am really hoping that you folks are going to hold him to his word.

The unfair elections act is punitive when it comes to northern communities. You heard some of the previous speakers talk about the circumstances of our communities, where people don't have IDs and there are no street addresses in lots of our communities. People are not coming to the polls with ID. What's happening is that people are losing the right to vote, and they're losing the right to citizenship. I'm sure you're aware that there's a bunch of northerners that come from the experience of not being recognized as citizens and not having the right to vote. The unfair elections act is not encouraging in supporting a change in that attitude. I'm sure you know a lot about the intergenerational trauma that has come from years of colonial governments and residential schools. Not being a citizen, and not having the right to vote, has had deep-rooted impacts on people's participation in our democracy. We need to have a robust election law that encourages and supports that right of citizenship.

We also need an election law that unmuzzles the Chief Electoral Officer and empowers Elections Canada to be that kind of non-partisan independent facilitator of open, transparent, and fully participatory kinds of federal elections. Given the shenanigans that have been happening around spending and around robocalls, you'll know that the Council of Canadians also launched a challenge around the whole robocall scandal. The courts did admit that there was widespread fraud. We need to have laws that protect citizens' right to vote, that ensures no party or individual has unfair advantage, and that ensures there is no particular interest that is buying an individual or a party.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado for five minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you to our three panellists for being here today. To the citizens who are here in the audience, thank you for being here.

It's my first time in the Northwest Territories. I wish I were outside playing, but I'm enjoying my time here with you.

I have a question about fairness.

We've heard from a lot of Canadians that our current system is not fair, and that we need to move to a system that's much fairer.

We've heard today, Ms. Balakrishnan, you feel that in order to have proper proportionality, you would recommend that the Northwest Territories have five members of Parliament. As you know, the devil is always in the details. How can I say to people in my riding of Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, in which I have 83,719 voters, that they'd get one MP, but for voters in the Northwest Territories, with 29,432 voters, you want five? Each member of Parliament would represent 5,886 voters. The time that a member of Parliament could allocate to their constituents would be much greater in the Northwest Territories than it would be in downtown Montreal, or Toronto, and so forth. I think it's great; I think we should be able to give even more time to our constituents.

We would also have to look at the costs. For each member of Parliament that we increase in the Northwest Territories, there is a cost of approximately \$637,220 just in terms of our member's operating budget, travel budget, and salary, not including the travel back and forth. We're talking about \$2.5 million every year to have four more members of Parliament. When we're talking in terms of fairness, it would be difficult for us to go back to Canadians and say that just to satisfy proportionality we need to increase members of Parliament in whatever region or whatever constituency to x number, but it's not proportional to the number of constituents.

I'm just throwing that out there because we're talking about fairness. It would be difficult for us. I'm not trying to pick on the Northwest Territories, or my riding, or anything, but how would we sell this to the general public if we told them they're not going to get to see their MPs as often as someone in the Northwest Territories? Could you comment on that?

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: There are a number of things that I can speak to on that one. This is not an argument in a court of law, but I want to say that when you say 83,000 people but you don't

meet with all 83,000, and all 83,000 may not need to meet with their representative.... You have heard our Minister of Justice talk of the status of the borders, or people, those who live in the north in different communities.

You talk about travelling. It takes a lot of time for a representative to travel to a community. That is where the time is mostly spent, not with the members and not with the constituents. The infrastructure in these communities is lacking. Unless you have local representatives, these constituents will not be served well. That is where the representation is lacking.

Further, I would like—

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'll stop you there.

On the flip side, one of our members, Nathan Cullen, who's not here unfortunately, lives in a very, very remote riding in B.C. He has the same situation. It takes him hours to go from one side of his riding to the other and to travel back and forth.

If I'm going to do that for the Northwest Territories or for Yukon, shouldn't we also do the same thing for him?

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: Probably.

These are the concerns that northerners have in general. Unfortunately, I am presenting only for NWT. If you had asked me to present for that community, I'd represent the same argument here.

My concern is, when you look at the ridings—this one is submitted in the revision—I have listed how many provincial representatives there are in each province and federally. For example, when you look at Ontario, the number of federal MPs exceeds the MPPs. I don't know how that happened. They should either have increased the provincial MPPs, or they should have reduced the federal MPs.

These things happen everywhere. It's only in the territories that it has not happened for a long time. It has remained as one. This kind of objection has perhaps never come up because of the situation of the people who live here. They have many more things to look after, and they have not taken this issue to the Parliament to ask them for local representatives.

Here, again, you have talked about the cost. I'm suggesting a different way to reduce the cost.

Ms. May has suggested how in New Zealand they have introduced seats for the aboriginal people. Likewise, we can form an NWT caucus. You have one representative who travels to sit in Parliament, and we have other representatives stay within the communities and look after matters while also attending to issues that are common to NWT as a whole, by working there.

My suggestion is for proportional representation. We will have all parties who have been represented already, and they have different views, and they can work together.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: You would have four in the riding, and you would have one who travels. Is that correct?

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: Five in the riding.

When you look at NWT, they are very complex. They have five administrative regions, and about 11 languages altogether, including English and French. They have municipal affairs communities in six regions, and each divides the community. So if you happen to bring a system to that, it is difficult. Yet, if we are going to do it, we have to consult with them.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Reid now, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you to our witnesses.

I have two thoughts. First of all, I should say I have to agree with my colleague Ms. Romanado about the underlying problem, but I actually don't think you can add seats for the north unless you were to do the same thing in the south, which would create massive constitutional issues. It would also guarantee enormous unpopularity for our proposal if you were to quintuple the number of seats up here. Given the fact that the north already has half or less than half as many voters per MP, I think you would really have to quintuple the numbers down south, and I don't think the Canadian people would go for that. We'd be talking about 1,500 members of Parliament.

Just to make this point, there are 44,000 people living in the Northwest Territories, and in my riding of Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston there are 98,000 people, so that's more than twice the number in the territory. You can say they are southerners and they've got it good, but it's actually one of the poorer ridings in Ontario. I know of constituents who don't have electricity. We have an aboriginal population which, while it's actually been very, very successfully integrated, still has an unresolved land claim very similar to situations up here. And being a rural area, people are very spread out on the ground. It's not like they need less representation. I would say they need representation and service to the same degree, but already their vote is worth less than half of the vote of a person up here. I don't, by any stretch of the imagination, have the most populous riding in my province. To say that your vote should be worth one-tenth of the vote up here is just not something that is saleable, and I would add as well, not defensible, in my opinion, although I appreciate the good intentions you have in bringing it here.

I am very much aware of the fact that the Northwest Territories has a large number of official languages trying to accommodate the fact that it has so many different indigenous cultures, unlike Nunavut, which has a relatively homogenous indigenous culture that predominates. There's an enormous amount of complexity, and I have no clever idea how to resolve it except to say that your MP, if well chosen, will have to be a very skilled individual to accomplish that.

I'd like to start with you, Mr. Robinson. Three times in your presentation you said, "We are not experts", and you proceeded to get right a number of things that a number of people with Ph.D. after their names got wrong before our committee, so I was impressed. I think you're more of an expert than you give yourself credit for.

We did hear when we were in Whitehorse about what New Zealand has done. They have Maori districts. I think one American state, the state of Maine, has three aboriginal districts, which they would call Indian districts, one of which is assigned to each of the

three, as they would call them, Indian tribes—we would say first nations—of the state. There are a bunch of restrictions on them, and I won't go into details.

The Maori model, on the one hand, is very impressive, but, on the other hand, Maoris are essentially ethnically homogeneous. They aren't spread evenly across the country, but they're spread in such a way that you can accommodate them, and as a further consideration, they don't have the kind of restrictions we constitutionally have. They aren't federal, so you can design your ridings like anything you want. That's why they can deal with their seven districts.

Having put all those caveats in place that are problems, what in general do you think of trying to figure out a way of pushing through, either aspirationally, which we could do, but we'd have to change the Constitution, or perhaps practically, the idea of providing separate indigenous representation?

• (1720)

Mr. Andrew Robinson: I'm here to speak on behalf of Alternatives North, and we haven't discussed that, so I won't give an answer on their behalf, but, myself, I would look at two things. One is this issue of how to run a proportional system in parts of Canada where there's a low population. It's not just the three territories. I grew up in Labrador, which is very similar. It has one MP. Talking about northern provinces, you talked about Nathan Cullen's riding. If we could come up with a system that gave a little but more representation to the northern parts of Canada, you would also inherently give more representation to indigenous peoples, not all of them, but some.

I would suggest, again personally, that perhaps the Senate would be a good place to put... When you get to reforming the Senate, when we do, it's a fantastic place to have a council of elders or something like that where it's a place of second thought. That seems to fit better with the whole idea of indigenous representation. Some Senate seats could be set aside.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Boulerville.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerville: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for being here today. I am pleased to be with you. This is the first time I have come to Yellowknife.

I will not go back over what will happen to the very large districts. Since I am a member of a district with an area of 11 square kilometers, this subject is somewhat beyond my understanding. However, I am very pleased that you have come here with proposals.

The committee has a mandate to study a new voting system, a new way to ensure that voters' ballots, once placed in a box, result in the election of MPs and thus in representation in Parliament. You are also right to say that the present system creates absurdities and incoherences and betrays the will of citizens to the extent that their choices are not represented.

A very big red wave broke over the Maritimes and the Atlantic region last year. The Liberal Party—so much the better for Mr. DeCoursey and his colleagues—won all 32 seats in the Maritimes. However, I do not think they received 100% of the votes. They got 61%, which is very good.

The fact remains that 40% of people voted for the Conservative Party, the NDP and the Green Party. However, those 40% are not represented in Parliament. Their voices are not being heard there. The situation is somewhat the same on Vancouver Island, where the New Democrats and Ms. May occupy the seats, but where 20% of people voted for the Liberal Party and 20% for the Conservative Party. However, those people are not represented in Parliament.

Consequently, I am pleased that you are seeking solutions that involve greater proportionality. The role of Parliament is to reflect society and people's will.

Ms. Balakrishnan, you raised the list issue. The issue of the list, which is entirely legitimate, comes up in a mixed-member proportional voting system. You do not seem to be in favour of a closed list so that voters can have more control and make their own choices. I would like to hear the views of Ms. Little and Mr. Robinson on the subject.

Would you opt for an open list or a closed list in a mixed-member proportional voting system?

Ms. Little, go ahead, please.

• (1725)

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Little: No. I don't have a position.

Certainly the Council of Canadians has been pretty flexible on this. Our position has always been that we want to ensure that rigour is brought to bear on all the candidates, whether they come as individuals or from a party. We also want to ensure that there is no manipulation or buying or selling of that representation. From the legislative point of view it is so important to us to make sure that there is a system that ensures rigour and fairness.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: At Alternatives North, we didn't take a position on open lists or closed lists. I'll point out that a dual member proportional system, with two members in each riding, gets rid of the problem of the lists because it uses the other candidates who are running. They are selected as the second MP, depending on how the proportionality works out in the region. I think we lean towards open list or a dual member system.

Thanks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you.

Fears that a new voting system may be complex are often cited. There can be no doubt that the present model is the simplest. Everyone understands how it works. Primary school children could use it.

A mixed-member proportional system involves two votes, one for the local member and the other for the party, which guarantees proportionality. I think it is quite easy to explain. It is not very complex.

However, do you think the government should conduct an education, communication and awareness campaign if we change voting systems in order to explain what the switch from one system to another entails?

Since the various voting system choices are not often included in the material taught in schools, people know little about the subject.

[*English*]

Ms. Lois Little: I could speak to that.

I think it's not complex, and we should never underestimate the intelligence of our citizens. Having said that, though, we should expect that Elections Canada has a very active role in educating the population about the whole electoral process and the system. That role has been diminished with the unfair elections act. We have people who think they're electing the prime minister—that whole Americanization thing. Again, I'm back to legislation that really enables that to happen.

We have people here in the Northwest Territories...the way we vote in our MLAs is akin to the mixed member system.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Now we will hear from Mr. Ste-Marie.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, ladies, sir.

I am going to ask you some questions that may be gut-wrenching, but I will be interested in the answers you give me. That is why I am asking them.

Ms. Little and Mr. Robinson, I would appreciate a personal answer if you do not have a mandate from your organization.

I will begin with you, Mr. Robinson. You said you would like to have the three current members for the three territories, plus three more members who would be elected, again for all three territories, under a proportional voting system. Is that correct?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Yes, that is correct.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: If we lower that number to a single MP elected by proportional voting, there would be four members in all, one for each territory plus a fourth to introduce an element of proportionality for all three territories. Do you think that situation would be preferable to the current one?

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Robinson: If I understood correctly, you're asking if we would have three directly elected members, one for each territory, plus just one more for proportionality.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That is it. Would that be a good idea?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Robinson: I think it's obvious that the fourth one would jump around, depending on very small changes in the vote, because you'd get three in, and then which party gets the fourth is not very easy, to be sure. It's better than nothing, but the proportionality is not very good.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Now I have a gut-wrenching question. Then I will put these questions to you, ladies. If you did not have an additional seat, and if the Canadian federation switched to a proportional system and the three territories kept their three seats without getting an additional one, would you prefer that they be by district, as is currently the case, or that they be pooled to create a proportional system for all the northern territories?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Robinson: That's a difficult decision.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I warned you.

[English]

Mr. Andrew Robinson: I would prefer to share three and go with more proportionality, but it would be very passionately opposed by a lot of other northerners who feel they require their own MP.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That is good.

I would like to hear from Ms. Balakrishnan.

[English]

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: Thank you.

We have already heard from our Minister of Justice, and Dennis Bevington who represented this territory for 10 years. They know very well how complex this territory is. As I have listed, there are many regions, many languages, many cultures, and so on. I have sheets, which I've not—

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: That is why I said it was a gut-wrenching question.

[English]

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: Bringing one person in common for three territories will not work favourably for them, unless you have local representatives for each territory. Since I am speaking on NWT, I suggest only local representatives for each region.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Consequently, if we switched to a proportional system and the northern territories unfortunately did not get more MPs—that is not at all my intention—you would prefer to keep a member for each territory and for the provinces to have a proportional system, would you not?

[English]

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: With one member, we cannot have a proportional system, first of all, and in order to make the proportionality while considering that all parties or at least a few

parties represent these territories, then we should have more than one local representative.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right, thank you.

Ms. Little, please go ahead.

[English]

Ms. Lois Little: I think that Dennis Bevington put it quite nicely. We don't want to be seen as different. We are part of this country, and everybody should be treated in the same way.

I think he offers a really interesting idea in terms of regions of common interest. We have lots in common with the northern parts of the provinces. I think we need to think outside the box and look at proportionality in those terms.

● (1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right, thank you.

The answers you have given me show how attached you are to a reform of the proportional system. That is impressive.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Ste-Marie.

Now we will hear from Ms. May.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you all for being here. I want to ask each of you a question, because I think I have a sense of where you are on this, and we do hope to work for a consensus decision ourselves inspired by consensus making here in the Northwest Territories. Say we found that we couldn't accommodate additional representation in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut but were able to achieve proportionality nationally, and therefore have additional MPs to ensure that 39% of the vote never again results in a majority of the seats, and doing so wouldn't affect the proportionality of representation for northerners. Would you find that to be an improvement or do you think we really must make sure everyone has a proportional and local representative as well as the one MP you each have now?

I'll start with Ms. Balakrishnan and then work to Lois and Andrew.

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: First of all, the studies done in the past have focused mainly on the southern provinces. They haven't looked deeply at the territories in terms of population distribution or geography. Therefore, national representation will be helpful only for the southern provinces. I have already read about MMP and I learned from Fair Vote Canada about different types of representation, and they're talking about topping up and then local representation, which will not work for the three territories.

Three territories have all the same rights that any of the provinces in the south have, which has never been considered. It has repeatedly been asked how three territories can become one for the purposes of regional representation. Consideration of that idea shows how little consideration has been given to the territories, and politically they are far behind right now. If you want to fill the gap, you'll have to make some dramatic changes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Ms. Little.

Ms. Lois Little: I think Dennis said it quite well when he said that we're a more colonial state than the whole of Canada. If we start to get separated out and treated differently then we don't have a hope in Hades of really being part of this country. We have to be treated the same.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: I wish there were a way that we could vote and have our vote counted towards proportionality on a national scale. We don't need another MP in spite of colleagues' passionate arguments. We have one and that's enough, in my opinion. But if there's going to be a proportional system, we also want to participate.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That would tend to push us towards mixed member proportional, in which you vote for your local MP and you vote for your party preference nationally.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: If that were possible without changing the Constitution, then yes.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I wanted to pursue something with you, Ms. Little. The Council of Canadians did great work on the robocalls issue. It hasn't come up much because it's not directly part of our mandate, although we're looking for the principles of legitimacy and we want to give Canadians confidence in our voting system. We certainly never lacked confidence in our voting system until the robocalls of 2011.

The only witness mentioned so far is the chief electoral officer of Ontario, Greg Essensa. I asked him about it. The Ontario chief electoral officer has the powers that the Council of Canadians' lawyer, Steve Shrybman, has put to the committee on the Fair Elections Act, i.e., powers of subpoena and powers of investigation.

Do you think this committee can stretch our mandate in any way to make recommendations around the legitimacy and the ability of Elections Canada officials to pursue fraud?

• (1740)

Ms. Lois Little: I think you'd have to. You can't put forth any kind of recommendations for another voting system if there isn't the legislative support for that, to ensure that the integrity of the voting system is maintained. We know that, as you mentioned, the integrity has been compromised. The courts have recognized that. We really need to make that legislative change, and I think you can make that argument.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I want to commend Andrew Robinson and Alternatives North. When I used to be at Sierra Club, I was always in awe of the scope of your work. I don't know how you're doing on cleaning up Giant Mine, but continue your perseverance.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. DeCoursey, go ahead.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you to all three presenters here today.

I wanted to take the opportunity to allow for clarification of a couple of things. One was the notion, Mr. Robinson, of the territory voters voting in three different types of systems last year. They are all voting in a first-past-the-post system, but there is a difference between the voting system and the style of governance influenced by the political culture of the community in the region or the territory. Is that correct?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Technically, in the City of Yellowknife system, it's the first eight past the post, plus a separate election for mayor.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Fair enough, so there is a difference there. This is part of the clarification. In the territorial election and in the federal election, voters are going to the ballot box and casting their ballot in the same way, and what is effectively different is the culture of governance on the other side.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: At the territorial level, there are no parties, so you don't have the confusion in voting of whether you are voting for the candidate or for the party, so that's the difference. There is no party name on the ballot at the territorial level. At the federal level, you are voting for a party and an MP. At the territorial level, you are just voting for your member, and councillors are also without parties at the city level.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Is that an effect derived from the voting system, or from the political culture?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: I think that, at the territorial level, the political culture determines the voting system, but the parties are forbidden by the way it's been set up in the legislature.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: It's an interesting aspect of this conversation. To me, it highlights the notion that the voting system is situated within a system of governance that is influenced by the political culture of the place, and there is not necessarily a direct correlation between a different voting system and the style of governance that is achieved because of that. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Fair enough, but the two are linked.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Ms. Little, you mentioned voters being too busy to vote or thinking that politics doesn't matter, that whole idea of, "What the heck, it doesn't matter if I vote. Things are all the same, and nothing is going to change."

In my mind, that is not necessarily a cause of people thinking their vote is wasted, but sometimes it's different from people believing their vote is wasted. Is it fair to say that sometimes we conflate those two things, those two reasons that people are perhaps disillusioned with politics?

Ms. Lois Little: It's a possibility. I think the StatsCan report that actually looked at the reasons why people didn't come out and vote didn't really drill down into those kinds of connections.

If you are sent this message that it really doesn't matter, then you are not going to make the effort. That is not a healthy democracy. We want 99.9% of eligible voters to vote. That's what we should all want—or maybe we should all want 100%.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I would agree, and I would agree that we want to find ways to better engage people in the political process outside of election time as well.

We've heard testimony throughout these last three months that has led us to believe there might be a slight correlation between voting system change and enhanced voter turnout, but there is no direct link, and there are all these other contending and competing factors, such as the style of governance that people perceive will come out of the vote they cast, and all kinds of other factors.

I don't really have any other questions.

Thank you very much for the chance to be here today. It has been incredibly fulfilling, in a way, to have the opportunity to come and learn both of the commonalities and of the differences between these two territories, and I genuinely look forward to the chance to visit Iqaluit later on in this process.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Deltell.

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Before asking any questions, I also want to applaud the fact that we are in the Northwest Territories. Without telling you my life story, I have to say it has been a personal dream of mine to come to the Northwest Territories at least once in my life. We cannot spend 43 days here, but we can at least spend a few hours.

Earlier I went to the supermarket to buy a sandwich. I walked through the streets, where I crossed paths with my Bloc Québécois colleague. I even had to remind him of the time. I do not know whether it was a happy coincidence, but everyone I met in the street said hello. I do not know whether it is a local tradition to say hello to everyone. I do not think I am that popular here, but everyone said hello. That is something I will remember, and I will be pleased to tell all my friends in Quebec City about it.

Now let us talk about the reason we are here today.

Earlier your former MP, who represented you in the House of Commons for nearly 10 years, advanced a very bold proposal that deserves at least some thought. I am not saying I am for or against it, but I am extremely curious about it.

He said that, if in a proportional voting system there were MPs to offset voting distortions, they should be members representing the north. I am not talking about the north in the sense of a territory, but as a geographic location, as a human reality. So there could be inter-territorial and inter-provincial representatives, as it were. There

would be no boundaries within the provinces or territories but rather an overall northernness element.

[English]

I would like to have your comments on that.

First, Mr. Robinson, the floor is yours.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: That's an intriguing idea. Again, the Constitution has a lot to say about that, but I don't know exactly what it has to say.

I grew up in Labrador. I've lived many years here in the Northwest Territories, but I also lived in Labrador, and I can tell you that it is very similar. I imagine also in Nunavik in northern Quebec there are a lot of similar things.

I'm intrigued by the possibility of the dual member proportional system because in their proposal they showed a district that was western Canada. That included the Northwest Territories, Yukon, B. C., and Alberta, and if that's possible, then it's also possible to do what our MPs are suggesting and have a larger northern district.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Ms. Little, do you want to talk about that?

Ms. Lois Little: Yes. There has been a lot of talk in this country about nation-to-nation relationships, and this might offer an opportunity to look at the various treaty areas across the country. We live here in Treaty No. 8. North of us is Treaty No. 11. To the south of us is Treaty No. 7 and Treaty No. 6. There is some room here to have treaty regions of interest, if you like, as a way of breaking out of the geographic box that the NWT border or the Alberta border, or whatever, assigns to us.

I throw that out as a possibility, as a way of actually fulfilling our responsibilities for nation-to-nation....

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Ms. Balakrishnan, what is your opinion?

[English]

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: In fact, I have been informed by the present MP for NWT that there is already a northern caucus in Parliament and that we are integrated with other northerners, so these things are happening in Parliament. What my representation is expecting is a little more improvement in that so we can have more representation of local representatives. It need not be done by this proportional representation or electoral reform, but as a parliamentary process you can improve it further.

• (1750)

[Translation]

The Chair: Mr. Deltell, you are at four and a half minutes, but—

Mr. Gérard Deltell: I previously cut into the time of others. I will skip my turn.

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

Ms. Sahota, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'd like to ask Mr. Robinson or any of the panellists if you could provide a bit more detail. You touched on the different styles of ballots that you have at the municipal level and at the provincial level. You said that you select eight different people who you like. What does that look like? Do you rank them? Could you give a little more detail as to how the different ballots look?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Sure. At the municipal level, in the City of Yellowknife, councillors all represent the city, so all the people who run for council are on the ballot and you choose up to eight. Strategically what you end up doing is voting only for the ones you're absolutely sure about, because if you vote for one you're not sure about, you might accidentally knock off one that you really like. So sometimes you only vote for three or four or five. The mayor is separate, like a president.

At the territorial level, as some people have explained, it's split into ridings. First past the post, the only difference is that nobody is permitted to list a party name with their name and there are currently no organized territorial parties. Everybody simply represents their electoral region and then they work together to form a minority cabinet that is to pick the premier among themselves. They pick a cabinet. The premier assigns roles and that cabinet and premier operate in a minority position all the time meaning they have to get at least three or four of the opposition, which we call regular MLAs, to join and vote in favour of the budget and vote in favour of all legislation, and if they don't, the regular MLAs get quite upset.

It's an interesting system to watch. They end up with more of a steady flow of policy rather than flipping back and forth as one party gets control over the other.

Ms. Lois Little: I think you've explained it very well, Andrew.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, that was great.

Essentially what my colleague was saying is winner takes all at the end of the day. Whoever gets one more vote than the opponent wins and takes first past the post in all those systems.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Yes.

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: In that sense, they won't have an opposition as such. The territorial government is based on consensus building. We elect members for different ridings and they all get together, elect a premier, and the premier finds ministers. They do have sometimes, the executive or the ministers, have their own meetings and the MPs have a chair and they discuss all matters. If they have any concerns, they can ask questions, but they do not have an organized opposition as in the parliamentary system, and they do not have a question period for longer periods. Many of them come to an agreement on an issue that is required for the whole NWT, the riding office or particular constituency they agree on. That's why we call it consensus building, not party politics. The party doesn't come into play at all in that, and there's no official opposition.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I think that's great. It's fascinating. At some point people gather together once they're elected and strategically figure out a plan, figure out who they're going to vote for to become the premier...is it the premier?

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Yes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Then they form government together. The premier then picks some as cabinet and they form government. It's an interesting system.

What is the voter turnout? I think the minister earlier was referring to...and I can't remember right now what his testimony was. What is the different voter turnout at the municipal and at the territorial level?

• (1755)

Ms. Lois Little: Historically, it's been very low at all levels. There's a whole bunch of reasons why that occurs.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: What do you think those reasons are?

Ms. Lois Little: I think that, as I said earlier, half our population are people of indigenous ancestry who did not have their right to vote until 1960. That right and the way that people relate to this western style of government is deeply rooted in the way that people live in this territory. That has a huge impact on voter turnout. There is a widespread belief that people are not going to participate in a colonial system. People don't vote territorially. They don't vote federally, and they don't vote—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: How do we get those people involved? How do we include those people? That's one of the mandates this committee is looking at, inclusivity, and figuring out how we can increase voter turnout, get people to participate in the political process, and hopefully elect people who they would like to see in Parliament. That may have to do with the voting system and it may not. We are tasked with looking at a new voting system but we want to make sure that we find one that does that, and I don't know if picking MMP, or that style over this style, or which style we pick is going to convince those people to come out.

Ms. Lois Little: It's to be able to see their values. They have to be able to see themselves in whatever style of government we have. We have to have legislation that enables people to educate and inform and support people to exercise the right of citizenship. There's no silver bullet to this.

The Chair: We have to move on now.

Ms. Jolibois, please.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Hello, everyone. Thank you for coming. I really appreciate being here.

I come from a riding in northern Saskatchewan. From La Loche to Cumberland House, it takes me 12 hours to drive, and if I'm going to drive to the far north from my home, it will take me 20 hours, so I can appreciate exactly what you're saying.

Here I am, as a member of Parliament. I go to Ottawa and I hear my colleagues say, "We're Canadian". Yet in reality I don't feel that way, as a northerner, because of the discrepancies and because of the exclusions and because of how even the discussion occurring here.... A Canadian citizen is a Canadian citizen. That's how I see it and that's how northerners see it. So I really appreciate the input that you're providing to validate my thinking and what I experience even in my own riding. Thank you for that. I appreciate it.

I want to clarify about the northern caucus. There is no northern caucus. What we have going is an aboriginal caucus, an association. There are 10 members of Parliament, seven Liberals, one independent, and two NDP. We're trying to come together to form that. So we're working on that collectively.

Nation to nation, northerners, in my riding, and I'm sure Nathan's riding too, and all over the Northwest Territories, we, as aboriginal people, take that to heart. What that means to me is that I am the same citizen in Canada, so I have access to services and programs and to everything else. I'm really interested to hear how, first of all, we validate the 11 languages here in this territory and the other territories and the mid-north of the provinces. I'm really curious about how we could spend more time on that to make sure we engage northerners.

Are there any other suggestions?

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: First of all, my position is as an individual. I have lived in Ontario. I have lived in British Columbia. I have spent four and a half years in the north. The north has totally a different perspective with respect to the political system that has been practised and the way of living, the culture, the language, and so on. First of all, I cannot speak for northerners. I can only witness what I have seen. That's what I'm doing.

As I have already specified in my presentation, there's a process called duty to consult. For any change, anything that you'd like to make in a territory, we have an obligation to consult exclusively with the people of this land. Only then will we be able to get input that's constructive, so that we can go ahead and make decisions or implement anything. We are stumbling on different questions, and not having anyone to speak on that.

● (1800)

Ms. Lois Little: I've lived most of my life in the north, and I think what Dennis Bevington was saying is there are some principles that are intrinsic to government, such as working together, collaborating, helping each other, and working towards the common good. Those kinds of values are part of the nine indigenous languages that are part of the 11.

If we're not walking that talk in government, then you can use the Tlicho language or any of the languages, but if you're not demonstrating that in action, then it's meaningless and the elders will point that out.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Very briefly, we're talking about languages. We're talking about voices, and if the system hears people's voices, then it's working. If we can come up with a system that hears more voices of all Canadians, then we're also going to hear more indigenous voices, and that will be an improvement.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I want to clarify for the group that I'm from La Loche and I speak my Dene language, so I really appreciate exactly what you're saying.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kelly.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you to the panel as well as our audience members for attending.

I want to thank all three organizations, the Council of Canadians, Fair Vote Canada, and Alternatives North, for the work and the preparation that has gone into the presentations. They all were very detailed. Our committee has heard from a wide variety of experts and different lobby or advocacy groups that have positions on what system should be recommended for change. We've had a lot of people come out to attend these meetings to give private remarks as well.

One of the experts that we heard from, who was an advocate herself for proportional representation, pointed out that the consultative process that we are undertaking has failed to attract younger, less wealthy, less educated, or other marginalized groups, to attend many of the meetings. She said that the meetings have tended to attract a specialized group of people, those people who are very keen on the subject matter and probably possess a fair bit of specialized knowledge. I would also, perhaps, add to her list of people that we have not seen at meetings, people who simply have varying levels of interest in the subject matter. They might certainly vote. They might think from time to time about electoral systems, but they are perhaps not willing to give up a day at work, or hire a babysitter, or otherwise give up other things in their day-to-day life to tell our committee what they think.

We are hearing specialized testimony both from expert panellists and audience members, and ultimately we've been asked, and there's desirability that we've heard from this panel, about finding consensus. Well, real consensus would actually be everybody in Canada agreeing. That's consensus: everybody agrees. There would probably have to be a lower threshold than that. It's not reasonable to expect millions of people to all agree on something, but the legitimacy of the outcome is extremely important.

Ms. Little, you told us that we must never underestimate the intelligence of citizens. Then why not put the final recommendation of this committee to a direct vote, to all Canadians including those who were either too busy or something to come and tell us what they think at a microphone at an open public session?

● (1805)

Ms. Lois Little: I'm not sure this committee is being connected to the youth and the marginalized, as you rightly point out, but you have a parallel process that's going on with the minister responsible. Minister Monsef has been through Yellowknife and had a pretty good turnout at her evening meeting and her afternoon meeting. A pretty diverse bunch of people showed up. I would really hope that you folks are going to be getting the input that she heard at these meetings she was holding, because there were a lot of young people and there were a lot of people who are kind of living on the edge, that I saw out at the meetings here in town.

I don't think we should be going down this road of a referendum, because I don't think it's going to get us anywhere. The history of referendums in this country is abysmal and if we can learn from anything that's happened around the world about referendums, I think we want to stay as far away from them as we can.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Notwithstanding that New Zealand changed to proportional representation by referendum.

Ms. Lois Little: Yes.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Well, I don't know what else to say.

The Chair: The time is up, anyway.

Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks to our panel for being here. It's been a very good session.

A lot of the questions I had have been covered by my very thorough colleagues. What I want to do is give you the opportunity in these closing couple of minutes to share if there's anything else from a northern perspective that you think is an important message, either from you personally or the organizations you're here to represent, that you want us to consider in our deliberations as we look to find an alternative that will meet the needs of Canadians, including northerners, including residents of Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories, and a new type of voting system. I'll just leave it open-ended with that if there's a parting, final thought you'd like to share, please.

Mr. Robinson, go ahead, please.

Mr. Andrew Robinson: Thanks for the opportunity. I'll take it to respond to Mr. Kelly a little bit.

This committee's job is to talk about better ways of governing and making decisions. We're talking about majoritarian decision-making versus other possibilities, and that proportional representation is a way of hearing more voices, whereas a referendum is exactly the same system again, where we're only going to accept first past the post as a way of making a decision.

I would like to put it back to the committee, which I am very happy to see is representative of the vote nationally. You are tasked with coming up with a consensus position in the more human way in which we all like to make decisions. I strongly put that on you as committee members to try to move beyond partisanship, try to get a consensus, and to give us, as people in Canada, something that's going to work better. Then take it back to Parliament, and let's see if, for once, Parliament can actually do something to reach consensus and bring a proposal to Canadians that will make the system better.

That is why we voted you in, so get to work.

Ms. Lois Little: Well said, Andrew. I don't think that I can add anything more to that.

I urge you to use all of the expertise that you have available to you. Consider the wealth of expertise of people like ex-parliamentarians, like Dennis Bevington, who have been looking at the Scandinavian system and worked closely with it. There are so many possibilities in the world, so let's not get trapped in a box.

Thank you very much for your work.

● (1810)

Ms. Janaki Balakrishnan: My comments are that adaptation is expected in Canada. New immigrants, when they come, are expected to change to the Canadian system. However, in the Canadian system, there is not much flexibility to accept them. We struggle a lot.

Here in the northern territory we are holding this meeting. If it were conducted by northerners, it would have been a round table discussion, not a colonial system of having a rectangular table facing opposite each other. That in itself is saying the government has not adapted to other people's needs.

Also, on voting for different referendums, in 1992 I became a citizen. I was very eager to vote in a democratic system, which I believe works well. In 1992—the Meech Lake accord—I voted, but I do not know what impact my vote would have had. Although I am a master's degree holder from the University of Toronto, I wouldn't know all the intricacies of the politics that would make the change. That's why. Everyone is busy with many other things that are overwhelming, so understanding a referendum and voting on a referendum is not an easy matter. That is why we have elected members, and we expect members of Parliament to take the initiative, to take the responsibility, and to implement what is best for Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: It's been a very interesting discussion. Thank you for all the preparation you put into your comments and remarks, and thank you for sharing your uniquely northern perspective with the committee.

We never thought we wouldn't come to the north, but if ever there were any doubts that we would gain a valuable perspective by coming here, those have certainly been laid to rest, so thank you very much.

We're going to break until 10 minutes to 7:00, which means that by 7:00, we should be ready to go with our third panel. Thank you very much.

● (1810)

(Pause)

● (1900)

The Chair: We'll open the session for our third and last panel here in Yellowknife.

We have with us Mr. Alexander Lambrecht from the Northern Territories Federation of Labour. It's nice to see you again, Mr. Lambrecht.

We also have with us Mr. David Wasylciw from OpenNWT.

The witnesses have 10 minutes each to present.

I think you may have been here for some of the discussion we had right before the dinner break, so I believe you understand that every member will get five minutes with the witnesses.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Lambrecht. You have 10 minutes.

● (1905)

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht (President, Northern Territories Federation of Labour): Thank you very much for being here.

I'd like to first acknowledge that we are on the traditional territory of the Dene people. *Mahsi cho*.

First, to the committee, welcome to Yellowknife. I hope you have been able to experience first-hand what makes each territory unique: the people and the land.

The Northern Territories Federation of Labour, or NTFL, represents over 10,000 workers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. We advocate for workers' rights, and we strengthen and protect the democratic institutions of our society, encourage all citizens to exercise their right to be heard, and promote peace and freedom in the world.

The population of the three territories represents only 0.03% of Canada's population, but the territories make up 39% of Canada's geographical area—3.9 million square kilometres—with the oldest known rocks in the world, an abundance of natural resources, some of the harshest living conditions, both natural and man-made, and the bravest, toughest, kindest, and most knowledgeable people—both in northern Canada and on northern Canada.

Often we northerners are forgotten, ignored, and told from the south what the issues are in the north, and how we should fix them.

Across Canada there are still many remote communities that do not have access to reliable broadband Internet, many with infrastructural deficits that create barriers for northern communities, especially in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Now is the time to put aside political rhetoric and interests and do what is best for Canadians by adopting an electoral system that represents the diversity of the people who are Canada.

In terms of the first-past-the-post problem, it's an electoral system that we inherited from the British before Confederation, at a time that was politically and socially very much different from today. The problem with first past the post is that it creates distorted electoral outcomes and false majorities. Voters often vote against something, instead of voting for something they want. It generates and increases regional tensions: us versus them and big jurisdictions versus small. It creates barriers for women and minorities in being elected. It creates an environment in which parties fight each other instead of fighting for Canadians.

As you're all aware, but for those who are listening and may not know, in terms of the timeline, in the last election, in 2015, nine million votes were wasted. They did not go towards electing an MP. In June 2016 the electoral reform committee was formed to consult with Canadians. By December 1, the committee must report to Parliament. By April 2017, the committee has promised to present the legislative plan for electoral reform, and June 2017 is the deadline for Elections Canada to be able to prepare for a referendum, if need be.

The three principles from the NTFL on electoral reform are that no party should be able to win a majority of the seats without the majority of votes; that any reform should ensure that the number of seats a party receives is proportionate to its share of the received votes; and that reform should take into account the importance of local representation, which is especially true and important for the north.

Proportional representation is not complicated. It's just fair. Simply put, 51% of the votes entitles you to 51% of the seats. Ultimately, we feel that PR helps to address the alienation and dissatisfaction that voters feel, in that votes count, there are more choices, and there are increases in voter turnout, as seen in countries that currently use PR. As well, it may improve system satisfaction and political attitudes if the saying "make every vote count", whose meaning is currently hollow, were actually true. It helps to close the gap between rich and poor and to elect more people from unrepresented groups due to the balance of PR in determining the number of seats from the percentage of votes.

In co-operation, conversation, and counting more votes, PR will bring a much-needed balance to the House of Commons, which would hopefully get parties to work together to build consensus instead of fighting each other.

Under PR, we're supportive of two potential models. Mixed member proportional representation, we feel, is the simplest way for Canada to move forward. However, simplicity is not the primary reason. It's a fairly balanced representation in the House, which is what we are seeking, and we want fair balance between local and party representation. It's still possible for a party to win a majority government with proportional representation; however, only if they receive the majority of the votes—fair and proportional.

The single transferable vote is not the simplest way for Canada to move forward, but it still provides a level of proportional representation similar to what MMP does. It could lead to changes in electoral districts within the north, and it could create tension between regions, as each territory has its unique identity, and northerners do not want to be represented as one homogenous territory.

● (1910)

In closing, the NTFL supports an electoral system that is founded on proportional representation to ensure the House of Commons reflects the diversity of the people of Canada; that removes the ability for any one party to receive a majority government without receiving the majority of votes; that party lists are open and support the model of representation through proportional voting; and that, regardless of the size of the jurisdiction, each candidate will have a fair and equal opportunity to be on the ballot in the district they are running to represent.

We won't support an electoral system that makes voting mandatory as it is not democratic. We may not agree with people who do not vote; however, a country that values rights and freedoms must uphold those values in all its laws and leave the choice to vote to remain with the individual Canadian. We won't support an electoral system that uses online voting until there is technology, a website, that is secure, unexploitable, and ensures that beyond any doubt and concerns of voters that the democratic process will be upheld in its purest form. We won't support an electoral system that does not guarantee that all Canadians who are eligible to vote, especially Canadians in remote regions and communities, have access to the infrastructure, reliable Internet, needed to cast their vote in their community, not outside their community, and ensure that all Canadians understand in plain language what they are voting on.

Thank you.

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

We'll go now to Mr. Wasylciw.

Mr. David Wasylciw (Chair, OpenNWT): First I'd like to thank the whole committee for coming to the north. I know you've been on a journey throughout the north and west of Canada, but it's great to have the opportunity to speak to you in person here, beyond just sending in written submissions and things remotely.

First off, for some context, OpenNWT is a non-profit civil society organization developed to promote open and transparent government in the north. The focus has largely been on digital tools to increase access to government information. For example, we have a local territorial version of openparliament.ca. We've developed a few systems to do government financial openness and searching electoral information, a whole bunch of systems like that, which are available freely on the web.

Additionally, just from my own context, I've run previously territorially, so I have some experience on that side of the equation as well. Some of the things I'd like to speak about today are a number of the questions that the committee has put forward.

First off, improving the election process in Canada is a very important topic, and the reforms very much need to speak to all Canadians, not just those who choose to come to a standing committee meeting. That's probably a pretty select number of people. There are only so many who find the format terribly comfortable.

In previous years, there have been things like voter ID changes, and a number of things that have ended up disenfranchising Canadians. Obviously, it was not the intent, but looking at parts of Canada that are more remote, it certainly has different challenges than are faced in a lot of other places.

Too often when we talk about reforms, though, we often talk about throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It's how do we gut the system? How do we do things entirely differently rather than looking at what sort of incremental improvements, what sorts of tweaks and other improvements, we can make to a system to take us forward? There are certainly benefits to what we've been doing, and any number of things that we could do, but I think it's important to consider all of those.

One other consideration is that often we find, in speaking to people from the south, that the north is often considered to be an east-west set-up, that there are lots of links across the north. In reality, the northern territories tend to have stronger north-south links. Largely it's related to logistics, costs, that sort of thing. Quite often, even culturally, a lot of the links and similarities between the territories tend to be with the provinces they're above. There are more direct flights, for instance.

We were talking earlier, and the cost of a flight east to west in the north is quite expensive. Often it's actually cheaper to fly down to Ottawa to get to Nunavut than it is to fly all the way across. Until recently, there were no direct flights to Yukon. In the last year, there's been one created, which has been great, but those links don't always exist. When we talk about northern representation, there really is a difference in culture and in people who are required to balance that out.

Overall, there are a few points to touch on. One is the modernization of the electoral process. I know the committee has heard from previous speakers that there's a lot that needs to be done to actually modernize the way elections work: getting your voter card in the mail, having the standard paper lists when you go to vote. All of these things, frankly, are logistically challenging. They're difficult. In the north, we could have problems even getting workers to run elections.

In this past year, there were a number of elections. We had three in a two-month period. All of the elections had trouble holding on to staff. Trying to get all of these things to happen at once is a challenge, and there are a lot of ways that technology can be used to improve that. The act is obviously quite dated in its origins now.

On the note of modernizing elections, online voting has been a big topic, and I know it's something that the committee has considered. One of the things I'd like to ask about the whole issue is what problem it actually solves. It's worth considering, and it certainly has some advantages to it. Again, it helps modernize it. As you've heard already in the north, connectivity is quite an issue. Even Yellowknife only has a single connection to the south. In the north, we have entire communities that share the equivalent of a slow cable modem for 1,000 people.

There are a number of barriers that way that create problems. In fact, our smallest communities have probably our highest voting turnout rates in the north. Those in the small communities seem to have a strong civic duty on voting, which is fantastic, and often it's bigger cities and bigger centres, even in Canada, that occasionally have turnout issues.

One of the challenges in Canada isn't that it's too hard to vote. It's pretty easy to go out and vote on election day. There's a voting poll every time you turn around. There are a dozen parties telling you that tomorrow is the day to vote, today is the day to vote. You can get a ride; you can get all kinds of things. If you want to go early, you want to go late, there are a whole bunch of opportunities that exist. It's important that if we're doing it, it's not just for convenience, but about how it actually enhances the process and our elections.

● (1915)

Related to that is mandatory voting. It's an interesting concept. I think it's difficult for a lot of people to talk about and put their heads around, because it does seem like forcing people to go out and do something.

On principle, I'm not against the idea of mandatory voting, but there needs to be catches in the system that would allow people to not vote. Just because you go to vote doesn't mean you have to vote for someone on the ballot. We should probably have that anyway. I know that a number of provinces in Canada already do have the ability for voters to go and deny their ballots, and that's an important message to be able to send.

At the same time, we have to reinforce the importance of voting and the celebratory nature of it. I'll talk about that a bit throughout this, but too often we don't celebrate the importance of voting and how much of a big deal it is. It's not that we have to celebrate and have parties around it. Those deeply involved in the system do, but there needs to be ways to get the rest of Canada to consider it the great occasion that it is. It's something to celebrate that we get out to vote and elect the government. If there's a wholesale change, or if there are minor changes, it's a big deal and it's affected by one person going out and casting a vote. Everybody can count.

In a lot of countries the mandatory voting is also a civic holiday. It becomes a community celebration and that's something worth considering maybe not on its own, but with a number of these other pieces. Maybe there's some validity there. The more we can show Canadians that individual votes and going out to vote does impact the system, even in the current system today, the better. Just because you're in a riding where 80,000 people vote doesn't mean that an election can't be decided by a handful of votes. It's amplified a bit in the north where we have territorial elections. In our last one here we had ridings decided by three votes. It's a bit of a different scale, but it's still amazing to see, and people don't always understand that their votes matter. When you look at those kinds of numbers, how do you connect with everybody and show them? If that doesn't do it, we have to find other ways to demonstrate that.

The fundamental question...a lot of the efforts discussed today have been about the power of individual MPs and the balance on parties. I heard the first panel, and a lot of discussion came up around empowering MPs and minority governments, and PR leading to smaller groups and more MPs working together. I think that's an important thing, but why don't we look at finding ways to empower MPs right from today? I know some work was done in the last government on that. I know Michael Chong's bill did a few things.

Over the last number of years, power has been centralized in parties; power has been centralized in the PMO, and a number of other things have created an environment where perhaps MPs don't feel the full power of the position. The more we can do to empower MPs adds that strength to it. I don't think just turning to PR and turning to small parties necessarily does that, but the more we can do to strengthen that, then the more we strengthen Parliament, which is the most important thing in what we're trying to do.

When we're looking at party lists—and I know there have been some other discussions on other models—they don't necessarily lead to additional accountability. If people are voting for a party and getting a representative they don't know and didn't vote for, then I don't think that's necessarily a benefit. There are strong roots in our system and the accountability of an MP to constituents. I think that's something we'd have to find a way to uphold, however we develop it.

With regard to voting systems, there's obviously a number of systems proposed and a number of changes. I think one of the most important principles to keep in mind, which we've heard from other speakers, is that in the north, nothing could be considered that takes away the power of an MP for a particular territory or province, not that it's particularly an issue in the provinces. We only have one MP and one senator per territory. It's nice to see that representation, but it's important that no change would take that away. Rebalancing it,

however that happens, needs to maintain the power of the territories to at least have a voice in Parliament for themselves.

While we had a unique constitutional situation with the territories, it's important that there's unique representation. I know some of the development of systems around PR takes that away, or blends that, and I don't think any of that would be acceptable to the north. That just isn't fair or right for Canadians.

• (1920)

The north is already a great landscape. A single MP from any of the territories could never possibly visit all of their communities in a single day and could barely even do it in a week without a chartered plane. I'd never want to see any of them have to do that or have any greater territory.

The Chair: Sorry, go ahead, but if you could.... It's very interesting, but it's so interesting that we want to get to some questions.

Mr. David Wasylciw: I have one last piece here, which is on literacy rates. One thing we do in the north is to actually put pictures on the ballots, because there's concern about literacy and the ability of people to read names and to know. There's actually a photo on the ballot. It's something we've done regularly up here, with great success, as a way of addressing illiteracy. It's something to consider, but there is really a concern. We brought forward some recommendations territorially around ranked voting, and the immediate concern was literacy, and how people would vote and whether they would know how to vote: Is it one to three? Is one the top one? Is three the top one? How is it all going to work? Those were the immediate, 30-second questions by our MLAs here.

In summary, the overall goals of electoral policy here have to be to get people out to vote and to make the system balanced and fair. One concern about some of these things is that we keep dragging out our election periods. I know the last one was very long. As we move to newer voting systems, we're creating more and more advance poll opportunities, but another piece of it is that we're also moving elections to be even earlier. Something needs to be done to make sure that elections happen within the election period and to keep them a little bit to that, because right now they are growing, and I'd hate to see that growth continue since it takes away from, frankly, the importance of the actual day at the end. Some of these systems may have other ways of helping people vote on election day rather than going weeks in advance.

I know none of these changes and other things you're considering are going to happen just on their own. A whole bunch of changes that are tied together need to happen.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thanks so much.

We'll start the round with Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much to our two panellists for being here this evening. To the folks in the audience, thank you for coming out. It's great to be here. It's my first time in Northwest Territories.

My first question will be for Mr. Lambrecht.

Please forgive me if I'm direct. I have been known to be direct. My colleagues will tell you that.

We've heard it from other witnesses, and you brought it up again today, that in the last election nine million votes didn't count. We heard from another witness that, in fact, it's probably more than that, because at the end of the day, the median, the number of votes needed to win, is one more than the second-place winner. With all the people who voted, the surplus of votes, in your theory would also be considered wasted votes, if I understand correctly.

You also mentioned that you're not supportive of mandatory voting. If we had 68% turnout in the last election, would you then feel it's fair to say that the votes of those who didn't vote were wasted? If so, then how could you be against mandatory voting? I'm just throwing that out there as an argument.

● (1925)

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I wouldn't necessarily say that the vote of anybody who didn't vote would be wasted, because we don't know why they didn't vote. Were there barriers? Were there challenges that prevented them from getting out to the poll? Did they exercise, maybe, a silent protest by not voting, not knowing that there are alternative methods to contest, decline, return a ballot, or spoil a ballot, if you want to protest? I wouldn't consider them wasted votes.

Maybe "wasted" is the wrong word to refer to votes that didn't go towards electing somebody. Let's just say that, instead of nine million or possibly more votes being wasted, they weren't proportional.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: The panellist next to you said that in some ridings the spread was three votes. We've heard a little bit about what we call strategic voting. Say I'm really hoping that my Green Party candidate's going to win in my riding, and I decide, when I get to the poll, that I love my Green Party, but I don't think—

Ms. Elizabeth May: This is such good news.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: It's on the testimony, Liz.

I really want my Green Party candidate to win, but I go there and I don't think my Green Party candidate's going to have a chance. It kills me, but I'm going to have to vote for somebody else. If that person lost by only three votes, I would actually have had a hand in making sure that my preferred candidate got defeated.

I'm just throwing that out. On the flip side, suppose everybody said, "I'm going to actually stay true to how I feel. I'm going to stay true to my party. I'm going to stay true to my candidate. I'm going to vote for them regardless of whether I think they have a shot or not." Could that in fact change the result of the election?

I'm just playing devil's advocate.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I like it. That's fine. I'm a direct person as well and I play devil's advocate, to my own demise sometimes.

I would say that if we had every single riding, every jurisdiction where the MP that won, won by such a close margin, then we wouldn't have an issue. But we're not talking about a widespread

case. We're talking about a very small percentage of people who won by a very slim margin. I think you have to look at the reasons that people win by slim margins. There are very many reasons and factors that play into how a vote plays out. If there's a strong candidate, or the incumbent running against two completely new people, there's a good chance the incumbent's going to win, unless there has been some huge conflict. Maybe one of those two new people is going to split the vote, and one of the new people will win. There are so many factors, so many ways that you can split a vote, and a vote can come right down to the wire, so to generalize and say that it's not an issue.... Well, we don't have widespread close margins.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: If we did, then we wouldn't be here.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I have one more. I'm sorry.

The Chair: Very briefly then.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Generalizing, you said that first past the post creates barriers for women and minorities. How do you know that?

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: From what we've seen, the people who get elected, when I talk to various people in the community about different reasons why they don't run in elections, well, people

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I want to stop you there. Running for office and getting elected are two different things. The decision to run has nothing to do with getting elected. They are two different things. What you're trying to say is the decision to run is not based on the electoral system; it's a personal decision. The barrier for women deciding to run is definitely, and I can guarantee because I'm a woman, not the electoral system. It's usually the job. I've heard it a lot. A lot of people tell me how women don't win elections, or first past the post prevents women from running. I'm a woman. I ran under first past the post. I was the underdog and I still won, and I can guarantee you it wasn't the electoral system that prevented me from running.

I just wanted to clarify that. Thank you.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Reid now.

Mr. Scott Reid: There we are.

When my party had to choose an interim leader to replace Stephen Harper, a majority of the candidates were female, including the winning candidate, Rona Ambrose. I'm willing to share that electoral system we employed. We could just use that maybe.

I think we have to be a little bit careful, too, about making mechanistic assumptions that one system or another will produce substantially improved vote results regarding inclusiveness, whether it's gender parity or other forms of parity. I'm not saying it's not material, but I actually do think that if we're really serious about this, we need to focus more on some of the other problems.

Ruby, who sits with me on another committee where we're actually studying these very issues, I think can attest to the fact that there are some other very significant impediments that exist. I don't throw that out to say we shouldn't look at the systems. It's simply to say that this is not going to be the silver bullet, no matter what system we pick.

• (1930)

Mr. Wasylciw, you made a none-of-the-above comment about how to handle these things if you have a mandatory vote. I think it was you who made that comment, wasn't it?

Mr. David Wasylciw: Yes.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was you. Okay.

I agree with you. I used to live in Australia, where they have mandatory voting. Of course they don't actually get 100% participation, notwithstanding the mythology, and they don't enforce the fines—except against this one guy who makes a fuss about pointing out that he...you actually have to see this guy—for the obvious reason that there are all these people who are dispossessed and don't vote. There's the Australian aboriginal population, homeless people, people who haven't mastered the English language yet, people who are disabled. Notwithstanding the law, I think they recognize that there is something inherently perverse about fining those people for not participating. So I agree with you.

The other thing about it is that I think people staying home and not voting because they just don't like any of the candidates or the parties is actually a legitimate expression. They may not be motivated by the nature of the election. Those are legitimate points that would be disguised if you were forced to vote. It might actually be better to include a “none of the above” option, a box you could tick off. I think that would actually be great. I wouldn't want to do that and also have the mandatory voting, but I wouldn't mind having that as a way of letting voters who are unhappy express their point of view.

That's my editorial. Now I want to actually ask you a question.

I also believe there are significant barriers to people voting who are not part of the electoral system. You alluded to something that may be fruitful when you talked about people who are not literate. Several aboriginal languages in Canada, and Inuktitut is one, don't actually use the Latin alphabet. That does raise the question of whether or not someone can be literate but not in one of the official languages, and therefore are no more able to read a ballot written in our alphabet than I would be able to read a ballot in their alphabet. Is that something that is an issue, or am I just going in the wrong direction?

You can see where I'm heading with this. If a territory has an official language that uses syllabics, should we have the ballots printed in more than one alphabet?

Mr. David Wasylciw: It's probably a lot easier in Nunavut, where they only have the two languages. We have the 11. It is a factor.

Mr. Scott Reid: Some of the 11 use the Latin alphabet, though.

Mr. David Wasylciw: Yes, definitely. It wouldn't be prevalent in younger people very often these days, but definitely some elders and some community members wouldn't be able to read English.

Mr. Scott Reid: You have to be inclusive of even the exceptional cases when you're dealing with this sort of thing. Another possibility for those people might be not to change the form of the ballot but rather to have some kind of special instruction to the returning officers. This may already happen, I don't know. Presumably if you're in a remote community that has only one of the non-official languages spoken there and used, the returning officers are drawn from the community. I actually don't know that for a fact. I'm just guessing that's the case.

Mr. David Wasylciw: They often are. I don't know how Elections Canada always runs things, but I know that at times when they haven't been able to, people have been flown into a community to help as returning officers. I can't speak with certainty as to how they help people with voting. Certainly with any of these more complex systems, that would be hugely required.

I actually rather like the territorial solution of a little picture. I think it actually meets the literacy need quite well.

• (1935)

Mr. Scott Reid: May I just ask this question? The Northwest Territories is huge. Let's say I'm a candidate for the entire territory for one seat. I'm from Yellowknife, and the voting for this particular person is taking place in Inuvik. The person may never have met me or seen me. Well, maybe that's not realistic. Maybe they've seen me in the media.

I don't know, it just strikes me that this could actually become an issue. This is why state portraits used to be painted, before we had photography, because someone could show up in town and just say they were the king: you wouldn't know. That's a true story.

Mr. David Wasylciw: In the north it costs the MPs and candidates running in an election \$60,000 to \$100,000 by the time they're done travelling around. I know that the campaigns here in the last election cost the candidates a fortune. It's quite a bit of money to do all that travelling. Certainly not all of them were able to do that. That's been met by trying to send out more signs digitally, more information and that sort of thing, but that is certainly an issue.

The Chair: Mr. Boulерice, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our guests for being here with us.

I am very pleased to come to Yellowknife. This is the first time for me as well, and I hope it will not be the last. I am a southern guy, and I come from a big city. I am an MP from Montreal, and my district is much smaller than your territory.

Mr. Lambrecht, I am pleased to meet the president of the Northern Territories Federation of Labour and to be able to ask him questions. I am a trade unionist too. Before being elected as a member of Parliament, I was a union advisor to the Canadian Union of Public Employees. I am currently on leave without pay.

I am pleased you are in favour of the proportional voting system that you referred to. There is in fact no perfect voting system, but that one is consistent with certain values and principles. For some, the purpose of an election is, first and foremost, to elect a strong government that can implement its platform. For that purpose, the present system, the single-member plurality or first-past-the-post system, fits the bill very nicely.

Others think the purpose of an election is to represent or reflect citizens' will, choices, and voices in Parliament. For that purpose, the proportional system produces much better results because it does not lead to the distortions or false majorities caused by the single-member majority system.

You stated your preference and that of your organization. Could you give us more details on the type of mixed-member proportional system, with a single transferable vote, with open lists or with closed lists? How do you think a proportional voting system would be implemented in the Canadian federation?

[English]

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: Basically the entire process would have to be based on the foundation of what proportional representation is. Therefore, I'm not a fan of STV personally. I'm not going to take a specific position on either one, but the entire process that is electing our leaders must be open. There is no reason that people cannot decide on who the party lists are. The entire process has to be based on the founding principles of what proportional representation is, and that is simply fairness and openness. This is exactly what PR does.

MMP would be a much more preferable system to use. Anything that increases representation in three territories and for the three territories whether we stay with one MP each, or we get two MPs.... The one thing that we do not want is one large territory being represented by one MP, or having three MPs for one big territory with no designated jurisdiction. What happens when you have more than one jurisdiction in the north is somebody gets forgotten. The NWT and Nunavut are huge jurisdictions, and I know. I'm the president for both of them and I have 58 communities that I try to touch base with, and 25 in Nunavut all fly-in, with all sorts of infrastructure issues, and communication challenges. I can only imagine what it's like to be an MP for the NWT and Yukon, let alone Nunavut, where you don't have the ability to simply drive on a road.

Basically the north needs more. We need something that's going to work and where people are heard, and something that represents Canadians right down to the facet of what makes Canada great. Right now our government represents the people who chose to go out and vote, and as I heard earlier today, the people who are generally coming out to these committee meetings are people who are experts, lobbyists, have interests. Those are the people who don't represent the majority of Canada. They represent a very small minority and segment of the population, but they do not represent the average Canadian who is simply just trying to get by.

• (1940)

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much.

Mr. Wasylciw, you raised several issues or aspects of our democracy and electoral system that are very interesting. You said at one point that it is important to give MPs more power and perhaps more influence and independence from their political parties. You are not convinced that any one voting system or another can change anything in that respect. You are right, in fact. A proportional voting system is not designed to increase a member's independence or power, but rather to reflect the voters' choices more faithfully. It is nevertheless a good objective to elect more independent MPs who have more power.

This committee's mandate is to turn to the future and examine the options available to us to replace the present system, which is a single-member plurality system. You raised a number of points, but I did not hear you clearly say which changes should be made to our voting system.

[English]

Mr. David Wasylciw: That's very true.

Looking at different ways of voting, one of the issues I find with some of the MMP systems is the party lists and the strength it gives the parties. I think from having done a fair bit of research here looking at ranked and different ways of STV and those things, one of the most interesting systems was the weighted ranking of voting. With the standard ranking, by voting, you can disproportionately negatively impact your preferred candidate, where as weighted systems seem to avoid most of that, and you give somebody a four and somebody a three and add it up and the one with the top points wins the riding.

The really big challenge with that is just understanding how it works. I think one of the problems with a lot of these systems is on actual voting day. Somebody going into vote should understand that what they're doing, how they vote, and what they mark off equates to an MP. I think that system causes a lot of challenges for people in understanding how that works. That's not to say I don't think Canadians can get there, because I certainly think we can educate people and people can figure it out. Sometimes we like to say that it's too hard, so let's not do it. To me, that's one of the preferred systems because it does have a balance in the majority and the person who wins got a majority of votes in a particular riding, which is the ideal, but it's complex. My concern would be implementing a very complex system.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Monsieur Ste-Marie.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, gentlemen. Thank you for your presentations. They are the last presentations we will hear this week, and I must say the level has been very high. Bravo and thank you.

I have several questions. We will see how many I can ask in the five minutes allotted to me. I will begin with Mr. Wasylciw and then Mr. Lambrecht can supplement the answers.

In the present system, the member from the Northwest Territories wears at least two hats: he must toe the line of the party with which he is affiliated and he must defend the interests of the Northwest Territories. That person speaks on your behalf in the Parliament of Canada.

Which of the two hats do you think the present MP and previous MPs have worn most? Do you feel the local MP transcends the party line in order to defend his people first or, on the contrary, does he toe the party line and represent his party's values here?

• (1945)

[English]

Mr. David Wasylciw: Historically, at least across the last number of MPs, I'd say there's been a fair bit of representation of the north rather than just the party line. The challenge still though is that it's one voice. It's one vote in the House. It's one vote to win. Maybe they've been allowed a little extra leeway in talking about it because it's easy to get out there and say it, but it's still only one vote. Sometimes the results don't always equate to what we were hoping for or what they've been able to raise, but I think they've effectively at least raised issues of the north.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Lambrecht, do you have the same impression?

[English]

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I would have to agree with David that previous MPs have done the best they possibly can to represent the interests of the Northwest Territories, but I think often the party line drowns out their voice. When you work in politics, you have to make friends, and you don't make friends by going against the party line when you're a part of a party. That is the best way to politically assassinate yourself. For northern MPs, it's this constant double-edged sword that you are damned if you do and damned if you don't, and they do their best to represent their jurisdiction to the people who live in that northern jurisdiction, but I think often the power of the party just doesn't enable them to do what is right by their people.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Wasylciw, you discussed the difficulties inherent in representing an immense territory, including those related to means of communication, that is to say air travel, roads, infrastructure and Internet access. This committee will not solve those problems, but people talk to us about those issues in virtually all rural districts. Internet access in the country is somewhat like the electrification that took place there in another era. Today we need high-quality Internet service in order to take part in society. Let me say that again to ensure it is well noted. We hear this in all rural areas, and I imagine that those problems are greater here by a factor of 10. Thank you for telling us about that.

Mr. Lambrecht, I have a few questions for you concerning your labour association. You said you represent 10,000 workers in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut. Does that include Yukon?

[English]

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: No, it is not because Yukon has its own Federation of Labour. The reason the NTFL covers both

Nunavut and the Northwest Territories is that it has existed since 1980, 19 years prior to the beginning of Nunavut's existence in 1999.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: All right, thank you.

Mr. Lambrecht, what is the approximate percentage of aboriginal, first nations, and Inuit persons among the members you represent?

In addition, are many of your members mobile? In other words, do they come and work here for a few years and then return to the south?

[English]

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: Our membership is diverse. I don't have exact numbers for the demographics that make up our membership, but when you walk around any of the communities, you realize how diverse the communities are. In Yellowknife alone, I swear there is somebody from every single country in the world and even some that no longer exist. That's the way Yellowknife looks, and Iqaluit and Whitehorse are very similar. If you go to the outlying communities, they also have people from all around the world. I imagine that in the NWT we have almost 50%, if not more, of indigenous peoples. I would say that our membership has a high representation of indigenous peoples, as well as every other diversity under the sun.

As far as people travelling to and from the territories goes, we have diamond mines that employ a large segment of our population and a large segment of those workers travel from outside the territory.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Do you know whether it is difficult for people who move often to register on a voters list in this district?

[English]

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I'm not aware of any widespread issues. I am aware that there have been issues with things like residency times, registration, and getting documentation, especially for people who have immigrated to Canada. Obviously, there are challenges. We need to find mechanisms that enable people to vote, and ensure that identity verification can be done in a way that still enables people to vote.

• (1950)

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you.

[English]

We'll go to Ms. May now, please.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you to the witnesses. I want to acknowledge that we are on the traditional territories of the Dene and Dogrib first nations and many more. *Mahsi cho* for the welcome here in Yellowknife.

I wanted to explore some of the things that came up in both witnesses' comments. I don't want to generalize, but I think Mr. Lambrecht was much more willing than Mr. Wasylciw to say that a change to our voting system would change the culture of politics. I saw the two of you on different sides of that divide.

I want to make an observation and then ask for both of you to comment. I stand more with Mr. Lambrecht only because I've been in politics for 10 years, and it never occurred to me that one of the problems with first past the post was that it rewards cutthroat, nasty politics and punishes co-operation.

I don't think first past the post by itself has reduced the amount of co-operation and collaboration that we used to see in politics, because I worked for the Government of Canada in the minister of the environment's office in the mid-1980s. We had the same voting system, but we had much more co-operation.

On top of the things that have occurred that relate to the way first past the post rewards hyper-partisanship has been a trend toward unending campaigning. The election ends, but the spin doctors aren't let go so that they can go someplace to get relationship training and to try to become full human beings again. They actually keep working to destroy any thought of goodwill. That's all relayed in Susan Delacourt's book, *Shopping for Votes: How Politicians Choose Us and We Choose Them*, this notion of targeted, sectoral... If you know that all you need to do is get 35% of the vote across Canada and you need to get out your base, then what you want to find is the wedge issue, or what's now called dog-whistle politics.

I would say to my friend Sherry that you can't generalize from one woman's experience. I've spent a lot of time on the phone trying to talk women into running, and one of the reasons they don't want to is it strikes them that the atmosphere of politics is toxic.

Those are my observations. I ask both of our witnesses if that affects their thoughts about how our political culture is impacted or not impacted by our voting system.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: You know what? As somebody who is young—and I probably look much younger than I am; for the record, I'm 31, but everyone thinks I'm in my young twenties—I personally am disgusted with politics, the environment, what it's about. It's more adversarial. It's about fighting each other. It's about making people look bad, which is not what I was raised to believe or how to treat people.

From my experiences down in the States with bullying, it's horrible. It's one of the reasons I moved back up here, because I grew up here, because I don't have that environment, because people of the north and in Canada just don't seem to be that superficial or that vain. Politics has become almost this showboat: how can we make the other candidate look as bad as we possibly can to get people to distrust them; how can we get people to disassociate in their minds that this is a trustworthy person?

The amount of negative psychology that goes into campaigns that has seeped in from American politics is absolutely disgusting. The psychologists and the doctors who work within the other side of the spectrum to deceive, to manipulate, and to change people's minds use psychological tactics. I won't go into detail about it, but it's disgusting. Is that the kind of example that we want to set for our youth?

When we look at the U.S. and we look at the negative attack ads against Trump, they come out saying, "Is this somebody that we want our children to look up to?" As elected MPs, however you decided to run your campaign, if you run a negative campaign

against other candidates, well, is that how you want your children and the youth of today to do their campaigns? Or do you want to promote a culture of working together and collaboration that is based upon the principles, the foundations of some of the very first people who walked on the land that we know as Canada. The reason that they survived for as long as they have in such remote, desolate conditions is that they worked together, simply put.

• (1955)

Mr. David Wasyleiw: I'll just answer in a few words because there's not a whole lot of time.

I think that you're right. There have been a lot of changes in the last number of years. I don't think it's necessarily just tied to the voting system. I don't think people don't go out and vote solely because it's first past the post and if it was PR, they'd definitely show up. I don't think that PR would necessarily make Parliament work better. I think the issues are tied together. I think people aren't always happy with the way politics works, but I don't necessarily think the voting system's going to fix that all the time. There are other factors to it, I think, that need to be applied.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Definitely.

I'm probably out of time.

The Chair: Go ahead. Everyone else has gone over time tonight.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I always thought we should have proportional representation, even before I went into politics. I didn't even join a political party until I was 52. I was involved in issues, but not partisan politics, and it really did surprise me once I got into partisan politics to realize that, if you were to say something out loud such as, "Oh, I think that other party has a good idea", it would be interpreted as something for which you should be punished because obviously, you don't know how to play the game. Media hates it when people want to co-operate with each other, but voters love it. A voting system that lets you say...

One of the reasons that first past the post punishes that is that, if you're in the parties that are approximate to each other on the political spectrum.... If you were a Reformer when Reform split away from the Progressive Conservatives, you would really not want to give Reform any credit for anything because your base might bleed off to vote strategically for the Progressive Conservatives. Similarly, I find there's a lot of competition, which I really dislike, between the parties like the Greens and the NDP, about, well, if it's this party, you're going to lose your vote because they're going to vote strategically. If you knew that wasn't a factor, and maybe I'm being naive, I think that would change the discourse to be much more civil.

The Chair: We'll have to go now to Mr. DeCoursey, please.

Sorry, I treat that as a comment.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That's fine. You let me go over time. We're working together.

The Chair: We are. We are.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Mr. Chair, despite the liberties taken by my colleagues around this table, I can assure you I will continue to serve as a shining example of how someone can remain within their allotted time here.

I joke. It's the end of a long week.

I am not so cynical about our ability to overcome the toxicity that people feel politics has descended into. I feel as though I came out of a positive campaign, and Ms. May will know the respect with which I hold the candidate for the Green Party who ran against me in the Fredericton riding. We had vigorous debates throughout the campaign, but we share a mutual respect for one another. I think it's as much a matter of political will and the style of leadership that you undertake as a politician, as a group of politicians, that can play a significant role in helping move people past the way they feel about politics in general right now.

I think that speaks as much to some of the disengagement and the reason that people don't go out and vote. It's not always that they feel their vote won't count. It's that they feel it doesn't matter because it won't change things anyway, because politics and politicians are all the same. I think there has been some conflation of those two arguments throughout testimony over the last number of months. I'm not saying that some people don't feel that their vote doesn't count. I think it's a valid argument, but I think the two things get conflated every once in a while.

Mr. Lambrecht, while you were delivering your testimony, I was at the back of the room, but just to clarify, it's not the committee who will be presenting legislation in April. It's the intent of the government to put forth their legislation. You're right. We have until December 1, and maybe that was a slip-up but I heard you say "committee". So I just wanted to make sure that was clear on the record.

When you were speaking of incremental change, I first thought of the preferential ballot, and then you got into the idea of literacy challenges around the way that people would understand casting their ballots, and I was thinking about whether that was a literacy challenge or a comprehension challenge. Either way, it's an educational challenge. I then thought that would logically lead one

to think, as well, of the challenges inherent in an STV ballot, a single transferable vote ballot. Are there other literacy or education-related challenges that you see on any of the other ballots that could potentially form part of an electoral reform recommendation?

• (2000)

Mr. David Wasylciw: I think those challenges exist in every system, beyond the simple make one mark, and even that is sometimes challenging, based on spoiled ballots. I think any of the systems that involve numbering, involve ordering or overall weighting.... Systems that don't involve a weight but simply have, to some degree, the mixed member...with a single vote for a candidate, a vote for a party, probably take away some of those issues. It still creates them because you're voting in two separate blocks and making sure people understand that separation.

Either way, I hope that your recommendations include a healthy amount of budget for Elections Canada to do a lot of education, much more than they've ever done before, and that's probably going to have to be sustained, not just in the next election but in a few elections going forward.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Is the real need not for the citizen or the electorate to know the calculation that is taking place on how the ballot gets counted but rather what their vote will mean? In the Condorcet model, the weighted model that you spoke of, you effectively tell the elector that each candidate is preferred to all the other candidates in that riding. It's not a preferential ballot. It doesn't increase the seat magnitude in the district, but it does, in that case, deliver a candidate who is preferred to all other candidates by the greatest number of electors.

Is it important no matter what system of balloting you use that we allow the citizen to know what it means as opposed to how it is calculated?

Mr. David Wasylciw: Yes. I think what it means and where it's going or what it has done is important. I also think there has to be some place given to people looking at a ballot and saying, "Okay, this is what I'm doing", especially when it matters if you put a second choice down; whereas if you don't put a second choice down, it may actually give more weight to your top candidate or your second candidate. There are a lot of implications from putting the extra choices down, and people have to understand that part of it and know what they're choosing to do or not do.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Yes, that's good advice.

That's four minutes and 59 seconds, by my count, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: You bet.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Gold star.

The Chair: Gold star.

[*Translation*]

All right.

Mr. Deltell, please, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell: Gentlemen, it's a real pleasure for me to talk to you and listen to you. I'm from Quebec and I deeply appreciate being here. It will be last my comment this week. I deeply appreciate working with all of you. We've had a lot of fun and lots of seriousness, too.

Sherry, for the record, I really appreciate what you said a few minutes ago.

Gentlemen, I think we all recognize that the current system is anything but perfect and that there is a lot of distortion. We also recognize that there is no perfect system. If we change a bad system for another not-so-good system that is a real issue. The question is, are we ready to go there, and who are we to decide?

Alexander—I will call you by your first name—when you talked about all the people who testified before our committee, the schooled people at our meetings, you said that they represent a very small minority and segment of the population, but they do not represent the average Canadian who is simply just trying to get by.

Don't you think the best way to know exactly what the average Canadian thinks is to ask the average Canadian? The best way to achieve the feeling and the mood of Canadians is to have a referendum, as we had in three provinces, as we saw in New Zealand, which had two referenda before and another after the new system was implemented, and as was suggested by the president of Elections Canada, who said a few days ago that if we cannot reach 75% support in the House of Commons, we should have a referendum. What is your position on that?

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: Are you asking whether or not we should have a referendum?

Mr. Gérard Deltell: If we change the electoral system.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: Nothing is perfect in this world. It's a matter of how you look at everything. When we look at the results of first past the post, we understand what it means and we understand to a fault how you can exploit that system in your own interest. With a system like proportional representation, which has been used in many countries around the world and is starting to pick up in our own country, I think we need to stop looking for faults in everything and start learning from other people's mistakes as well as our own, look to places where things have worked, and not to spend 20 years doing consultations and studies on whether this is the right fit for whatever country we're talking about.

The electoral system in Canada needs to change. It needs to be more representational and proportional of Canadians, and it needs to get more people engaged, even if that means changing the system to get Canadians to have more confidence in the system. It can be explained to them and shown that it is a safe and secure system that is unexploitable unless it is the will of the voters to give 51% or more of the vote to a specific party or candidates to elect a majority government.

We don't have a room full of mothers and fathers and other people here. The people that we do have here are here for various reasons. I'm sure that we have some family people in this room right now. I have a son. I have a partner, and I have my son's family whom I support in various ways, but I don't represent all of Canada. I represent me and what makes me myself. Until we have people who are in poverty, people who are vulnerable, and homeless people coming in off the streets, only then will I say that we have heard from Canadians.

● (2005)

Mr. Gérard Deltell: David, what are your thoughts about that?

Mr. David Wasylciw: The simple answer to who represents the average Canadian is you. As much as you had different people presenting to the committee and different thoughts from across Canada, MPs represent Canadians. Like or dislike the way our voting system works, our MPs, whoever they happen to be, represent us. Whether you voted Green, Conservative, Liberal, or for anybody else, your MP is your MP, and they represent you.

I do strongly think that any vote on changing the electoral system ought to be a free vote in the House. I think it ought to be reflective of what MPs are thinking and what they're getting from their ridings. I don't dislike the idea of maybe defaulting back to a referendum if there's not a supermajority of MPs. I would suggest, though, that a referendum probably means not much is going to change, just looking at the results elsewhere. I'm excited to see what happens in P.E.I. next month.

Ultimately, we have a representative democracy, and you're there to represent us. If it keeps coming back to us all the time, it just gets expensive.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: On another point, very quickly, you said that we need to have a picture of the candidate on the ballot. What do you think of the suggestion that people have made to take out the name of the political party on the ballot and have only the name of the candidate with his picture?

Mr. David Wasylciw: I don't think it's a bad thing.

To be honest, I've been involved in territorial politics mostly because there aren't parties and because it's a consensus model. I think that's pretty neat. People can actually get in and try to do something and represent themselves and constituents. I don't think parties need to be the be-all and end-all, and certainly, in recent years, their importance of their strength has grown. I don't think it's a bad idea.

Mr. Gérard Deltell: All right. Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Actually, I'd like to go on from that question. We've heard a lot from people who have stated that oftentimes they don't know who the local member is until after the election. Then they get to know who the local member is, but at the time of going to the polling station, they may only affiliate their vote to a party. In terms of moving towards some of these MMP systems, it's very party driven. You're voting for a party. The party is listed everywhere.

Going off that question, if we were to remove the party's name, let's say, from beside the candidate's name, would that lead to more confusion? At times now, I'm also finding in some demographics that there is some illiteracy, or that they don't know the language that the ballot is in very well. That symbol tends to be the marker to identify who they might be voting for, because they can't read the English language or the French language. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. David Wasylciw: It certainly could present other challenges. I think that sometimes it's just easy to pick a party to vote for, and it doesn't really matter what the MP is saying. You're not going to worry about your candidate because they're saying whatever is being said in Ottawa by the party leader as they go around.

Perhaps that sort of system would lend more weight to what a particular candidate has to say or what they're thinking. If we were in a system with more power for MPs, it would be a bigger factor, frankly, in terms of what your MP candidate would be saying and what happens in Ottawa.

• (2010)

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I appreciated your comments about the language challenge here. I was just saying to my colleague that I don't understand why we can't just have.... You said there are 11 languages here. Why can't we just have ballots in all those languages? When you get to a polling station, you can request the language that you want to see your ballot in.

I don't think it would increase printing costs all that much, because you would be printing less in each language. It seems simple to me. Anyway, it is a thought for me to take away with this committee. In different regions that may have these particular issues with aboriginal communities, we should be looking at doing that. What do you think?

Mr. David Wasylciw: An important note to that, though, is that some of the languages aren't necessarily written languages. Many of them are in forms of written language, but not necessarily all of them. It wouldn't be an issue with every language, but it's a factor in some.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I guess we can only do what we can do, right? For the written ones, we'd do that, and maybe the picture idea is a great one to take away from this discussion as well.

Education came up quite a lot. We've heard that from a lot of people. I think that another one of the main reasons we don't see as much public participation in elections, or even in forums like this one, in consultations, is due to not being able to get the word out and not having a good education system at the school level in terms of teaching governance and politics. I think that's definitely something we need to look towards to increase voter participation.

We also talked about incremental changes, and these are some ideas to perhaps make incremental changes to our system. What other incremental changes do you think we can make that wouldn't be drastic changes?

Mr. David Wasylciw: Many of them, I think, don't just have to do with the electoral system. I know your committee is limited to the electoral system; however, I think that a lot of these issues are multi-faceted—what happens in the House and the way the House works. There is the idea of a stronger role for MPs, the idea of taking the

parties out of it, the idea of giving MPs more say on broad policy, the idea of moving to the Internet—perhaps Internet voting on the day of—as well as changing the way we do advanced voting and advanced polling as we create more and more opportunities. We are getting away from some of the original purpose of that, which was just to provide an alternative, but it's pushing campaigns earlier. We are doing a number of things, everything from changing the ballot to education, more open forums, and more ability to connect with candidates when they are running. I think that some of these little pieces, even when mixed with a wholesale change, can still do quite a bit.

There are a number of things. Even during campaigns, it's funny how much basic education you are doing: what an MP does, what an MLA does, how it actually works, why you are voting for them, and what they do that actually impacts you in your day-to-day life. People miss out on a lot of these things and think that everyone runs off to Ottawa and disappears, and occasionally taxes change, and that's about it. There are a lot of factors in the middle. I think a lot of it is education. A lot of it may be in the mechanics of voting, and how easy we make that, getting rid of any barriers around that, but also making it not just about convenience but also about the importance of civic duty.

I am a big fan of the voting holiday, making election day a really big event and having Elections Canada-driven parties or whatever else.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I have a question on elections here. Do you not have translators available at the polling stations? Rather than having ballots written in different languages, are translators available?

Mr. David Wasylciw: I can't speak to the situation in the communities. It would be an Elections Canada thing. I'm not sure. Maybe somebody in—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In certain ridings, there is translation available. I was also thinking that for those who don't have a written language, that could be something—

Mr. David Wasylciw: Frankly, in the current system, I don't think it's that much.... It's pretty ingrained. It has existed for a while, and people are pretty used to it. As you move on to the more complex systems, that certainly is going to be much more of an issue.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: If you have a very brief point that you would like to make, go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I'll just make a short comment. In my experience with my nomination, we had ranked ballots, and there were a lot of spoiled ballots, because some of the people were doing it for the first time. They were going in and memorizing that I was third on the ballot. It's a true story; I am not trying to make fun. In the end, I heard from the chief scrutineer that there were a lot of ballots that just had the number three beside my name, and that was it. There was confusion created by some people about how they were supposed to go about it. I'm sure we can overcome it, just as you said, through education and putting things in practice a few times.

• (2015)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Jolibois, go ahead, please.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Thank you for coming in and speaking. I appreciate the input you are providing. What I am hearing is that there have to be some changes to the way we vote and the way we elect MPs in northern Canada, be it the Northwest Territories, the other territories, or the mid-north of the provinces.

In terms of the translation the member was talking about, my concern is that, under the Fair Elections Act.... It was my experience in the last election that we couldn't even provide.... The people working there, at the polling station under the Fair Elections Act, didn't even allow elders to bring in someone to translate for them. There were people who were turned away in my riding because of that. Did you hear any similar comments about that?

Mr. David Wasylciw: Yes. It's more anecdotal than anything, but the Fair Elections Act caused a number of issues around that sort of thing, with the ID. Some communities have no way of getting ID. It takes them six to eight weeks to get a photo ID, or they have to fly south. There are quite a few issues, more around the ID and the accessibility of it, but I also heard some stories of exactly that problem.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: I really appreciate your presenting again an alternative system to what we have. Change could be good. Change can work out for the best, or sometimes it doesn't, but taking the steps forward to make that occur.... It seems to me, from what we've heard thus far today, this is what the northern territories are looking for, some kind of change.

Mr. David Wasylciw: I won't presume to speak on behalf of the entire territory, but I think some movement in some way would be desired by a lot of people in Canada. I think most people just want government to work, and most people want to be able to cast a vote and then to get good government out of it.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Alexander.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I'd have to agree. I can't speak for everybody who lives in the north. I can speak for myself and for the people that I know where they stand on the issue.

In life there's the old saying that if it ain't broke, don't fix it. But when there's conflict, conflict evokes change, and you can't have change without conflict. That's exactly what we have in this current electoral system. There is conflict. There are people who are unhappy. Canadians are tired of it. Northerners want the Government of Canada to work for them.

They want to be represented by their MP, and I believe there are MPs who do a very good job in trying to represent the territories, as difficult as their jobs are in being such a small voice, but having such a huge jurisdiction.

Ms. Georgina Jolibois: Could I have one last comment, please?

Canadians say—and I've heard this today, and yesterday, and I hear it in Ottawa—that as a member of Parliament I am there to represent Canadians. What I'm thinking in the back of my mind is that I come from the north of the province of Saskatchewan, and that the further north you go, the representation and the lens through which you look changes. Canadians who live in the north have different versions about being Canadian, democracy, participation, and the importance of feeling whether their voices count. The candidates they're going to support may not belong to a certain party, but they're going to support that person.

Is that your similar experience with the north here in Canada?

Mr. David Wasylciw: I'd say so. It's interesting that in territorial politics the lowest turnout rate for voting is in Yellowknife. The high turnout is in all the communities. Getting out of Yellowknife into small communities is where there are extremely high turnouts, and Yellowknife is rock bottom. Some ridings were 24% and in the communities you got into 90%. It's an interesting balance, but I think there's a stronger personal connection.

• (2020)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Kelly, please.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Thank you to our panellists and our audience members.

Mr. Lambrecht, you delivered some strongly worded remarks or had some definite passion behind the idea that politics in Canada was toxic, filled with anger and rancour. Do you feel the same way having participated in a panel among 12 members of Parliament who are earnestly working together, had a nice civil dinner together before we came back to convene this panel, and are travelling and getting along quite nicely? Is this a surprise or does it seem unlikely? Does this experience change your assumption that politics is all about anger and attack?

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: I wouldn't say I had assumptions about politics being about anger and attack. I think that before an election and after an election are two completely different periods, and when somebody is trying to get elected, the atmosphere and the environment is different from after they've been elected.

Once you're elected as an MP, you put on your best face and you work with the people who are also elected in order to do your job, or else the voters will tell you where to go the next time your name is on the ballot. It's not simply about politics and me thinking that it is generally toxic. It's all about the way people get elected. It's the negative perceptions of the campaigns that I believe leave a bad taste in people's mouths.

I believe that most people are good. It's simply that people get sick and tired of always hearing the same toxic stuff about politics, and the media is to blame for that, I feel.

Mr. Pat Kelly: Your final point about the media is interesting. I was going to suggest that different campaigns are run differently on the ground. This is Canada, and I didn't feel there would be any advantage in attacking my opponents and I didn't do it. I saw no reason to from the point of view of being a generally civil and polite person and also as a matter of the type of campaign I would want to run. I think most people at the local level are similar. I guess there are some who get into nasty dogfights but I don't think that's typical at the riding level. I'm not certain that this is an electoral system issue. In terms of your comment about the media, perhaps it's a matter of the lens through which people see their politics, but I don't know if that's an election system issue.

If I may move on, there are a couple of other things I want to ask about.

I had the courage a minute ago to pronounce "Wasyliw" and I practised it in my head, but no, I got it wrong. Sorry, David, I'll just continue then.

As a committee we've spent a lot of our time on electoral systems. There are other areas that are part of the committee's mandate. Both of you touched on some of the other non-electoral system issues such as online voting and mandatory voting. Neither of you are in favour of mandatory voting, if I recall. With the online piece we've had expert discussions regarding the implications of nothing being hack-proof.

I'll let either of you quickly weigh in on either of those issues.

Mr. David Wasyliw: I'm not dead set against mandatory voting. On its own it's not great, but if you do a whole bunch of other things such as having a "none of the above", having a number of other avenues, perhaps there's some merit to it. Again, I don't know if it actually solves the problem of the turnout number. It gets the turnout number quite high but not perhaps actual voter engagement. Online voting, certainly if it's a problem what is it solving?

• (2025)

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: As far as mandatory voting is concerned, how do you sell that to people? Are you going to put out advertisements and say that if people don't vote, these are the consequences? You're basically putting an even worse taste in people's mouths. You get them to associate punishment with voting. It just doesn't work for me. It's on a rights and freedoms basis.

As far as technology is concerned, you're absolutely right. There is no computer-based technology that is going to be 100% hack-proof. We can sure damn well try, but ultimately it's the people who design it. If there's an ulterior motive behind the people.... Put it this way: computers are logical and they're only as logical as the people who

design them and use them. If a computer breaks, it has nothing to do with the way they're using it. It's simply something illogical has happened, period.

Mr. Pat Kelly: I have a quick point, if I may.

We have had many people talking about some of the reasons why people don't vote. This is a specific one that I don't think either of you raised but we've heard it from the open-mike sessions and from other people.

It's a perception that only one vote isn't going to make a difference, and their vote isn't going to turn anything. One of you, I believe, mentioned something about close elections not being the norm. I might point out that there were four seats in this current Parliament that were decided by less than 100 votes. One of our members here at the table is one of them. When you have, maybe 75,000 eligible voters, and depending on your turnout, maybe 40,000 or 50,000 people and it comes down to a result of, the closest one was 61 votes, I think that maybe Canadians ought to be aware that every vote is important. Every vote counts no matter what system you use. Indeed, I think no one would want to stay home because they thought their vote didn't count and find out that an election really turned on a very small handful of votes. It happens in every election.

The Chair: Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks for the insights you've brought tonight in both of your testimonies.

I had the opportunity in the mid-1980s to the early 1990s to live in Fort Smith. It was where I started my career. One of the best pieces of advice I ever received was from an elder in Fort Smith. His advice was that sometimes you need to listen. It's a lesson I've carried with me throughout my life. In that spirit, I'm going to give you the opportunity to speak, and we're going to listen for this last five minutes before we go to the public session.

The Northwest Territories is a very special place, and I'd like you to share with us a sort of parting wisdom. I do a lot of exploring of values related to our electoral system, so I'm going to turn it over to the two of you. Could you share with us, as we get ready to leave this amazing place early tomorrow morning, things that you'd like us to consider as we go back to deliberate a new electoral system that would reflect things that are important to you as northerners, to your community?

I'll stop talking and listen.

Mr. Alexander Lambrecht: Simply put, listen to the people. Respect that some people in the north have lived here for their entire lives. I love the reality shows, and a good example is *Survivor*. That's great. Throw a couple of people out in some tropical place and watch them survive.

If you want to have a real survivor, throw them somewhere up in Nunavut and see how they survive. You could take me into the middle of the Northwest Territories, and based on the knowledge I have gained through northern schooling, having aboriginal friends, and going to aboriginal camps when I was younger, I could do quite well in the NWT out on the land. Nunavut is a completely different story. The way that you survive up there is entirely different.

Sit and listen to the people without any bias, without any judgment, without any assumptions. Chuck everything out the door and simply listen to what they have to say. Connect with them on the deepest level that you possibly can, and recognize that they live in the north because they love the north, as desolate and isolated as it is.

If we're going to be represented by democracy, we want the same voice as the rest of Canada. Although we may have one MP and it seems like we have a big voice, we really don't. We get drowned out by the other provinces. You talk about having 40,000 in the NWT with one MP, and then you have a larger jurisdiction—not any specific one—with maybe 100,000 people with one MP. Does that mean that the NWT, Nunavut, and Yukon should have 0.3% of an MP because we only have 50% of the population of a larger jurisdiction that has the right to one MP?

If we had 100,000 people who lived in each territory, it wouldn't be an issue to have more than one MP. The simple matter is, why don't people want to live in the north? There are tons of opportunities up here, but it takes a special kind of person to want to live up here and contribute to the communities of the north. With the communities that we all live in, whether it be Yellowknife or Behchoko or Inuvik, or any of the other communities in the Northwest Territories, every person has a reason that they live in that community. When you go up to Nunavut and you go to Iqaluit, you will see a diverse population.

For me, when I see people I know are not from Canada, that doesn't make them any less of a human or Canadian than I am. It just makes me wonder why. What was it about this far north, Iqaluit, that they came all the way from the Dominican Republic or from Jamaica? Why would you go from such a beautiful warm place to such a dry, cold, desolate place? It's because there are opportunities. The communities, the environment, the cultures there are unlike any place you will ever visit elsewhere in Canada.

• (2030)

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

Mr. Wasylciw.

Mr. David Wasylciw: In short summary, the north is special, both as a place and constitutionally. We're a bit more unique than a lot of places. Well, we're not more unique. We're all very special. It is important that the north be represented. Even just one MP doesn't speak to the importance within Canada, and the importance, frankly, of the money that gets spent up here. The north couldn't be built on one MP in Ottawa. It takes a whole bunch of people from a whole bunch of parties to actually help build the north, from a federal perspective.

Any system change needs to be fair and reasonable and lead to balanced elections. Any system change also can't be seen as benefiting just one party. The biggest fear is that a system of change

would come in that would be a benefit to one party. We'll go through the next election cycle with another party saying we'll change, and get into an electoral sort of battle over elections. It needs to be seen that it's going to be fair for Canadians and not necessarily fair to the particular parties, but it has to be something that's fair to the people. As was said, it's about listening. Any changes need to be made in a way that show that our government is listening to people in Canada and representing them reasonably.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

The Chair: That wraps up our third panel.

Thank you very much to the witnesses for your eloquence and insights. I must say, you've made some profound observations and added to the perspectives that we're gaining through this cross-Canada trip, so thank you very much.

Of course, you're free to stay with us as we go to the public session, which includes seven citizens of Yellowknife who would like to speak to the issue of electoral reform.

I'll just explain briefly how we function and how we functioned in other cities. Each individual is provided two minutes to make their statement about electoral reform. We have two microphones. We try to keep both microphones occupied. In other words, while one person speaks, the other person is at the other microphone preparing their remarks.

I'll call to microphone number one Tasha Stephenson, and I would call to microphone number two Chief Georges Erasmus.

Nice to see you again, Chief Erasmus. I don't know if you remember.... Well, I'll mention that when we get to your intervention.

Go ahead, Ms. Stephenson, for two minutes, please.

• (2035)

Ms. Tasha Stephenson (As an Individual): Thank you for coming.

I put my name on the list to speak simply so there would be a citizen here, because really, honestly, Friday night.... Anyway, I'm happy to see that there actually are other people who have found this more important than their social lives.

I am here to reiterate what I hope you have heard loud and clear from across the country, that we really, really want you to fix the broken system that we have and replace it with something representative, and proportionally so. That's my main point.

Thank you for coming to Yellowknife and hearing what we have to say. I'm really grateful to all of the wonderful presenters this afternoon who said very eloquently and insightfully everything that I wanted to hear. I hope you heard it too.

Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Chief Erasmus, it's nice to see you again. You probably don't remember, but we met about 20 years ago when I came up here when I was working for a member of Parliament, Clifford Lincoln.

Mr. Georges Erasmus (As an Individual): Oh, yes.

The Chair: We met maybe twice. We came up for the meeting of the Arctic parliamentarians here in Yellowknife, and I think we also met when I came up with the environment committee and we were doing a study on water and the oil sands. I think you were making a film at that time.

Anyway, welcome, and we look forward to hearing your comments.

Mr. Georges Erasmus: Thank you.

I recently became aware of this organization called Fair Vote Canada, and I've had a chance to look at the three different proposals they have for proportional representation, something I've been very supportive of all my life, although I've never gone into all the different details. It was very interesting to read their proposals and some of their ideas. In the end I'm supportive of anything that brings us as close to 100% representation in Parliament of the vote across Canada. I want an opportunity for Canadians to be able to vote with their heart and their beliefs, and passionately say, "This vote is going to mean something because now I'm finally voting for somebody, not voting against somebody over there, but I'm voting for a party that I really want to vote for."

I'm 68. I've been voting ever since I could, and it wasn't very long after aboriginal people could vote in this country that I was able to start voting. I have been very passionate about it. I remember working up here to get in our first aboriginal person when I was first able to vote, and working to get Wally Firth as an NDP member. For us to get an aboriginal person in was a very major thing,

Whether it's the mixed member, the multi-member, the rural-urban proportional representation, any one of those seem to improve... Some are better than others, obviously. Then there's the whole question of how many members you're going to add. Are you going to keep the number of members in the House the same? It means only so many are going to be elected by a process where, perhaps, it's still first past the post, and then the rest are proportional, whatever, but I recommend that you try to get as close as possible to 100% representation.

For instance, in one of the versions, apparently, we would have had eight Green members this time. Wouldn't that have been an amazing thing?

I want to talk about something else. One of my previous jobs was as co-chair of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. In the report, in volume 2, "Restructuring the Relationship" there is a section that talks about not only self-rule or self-government for aboriginal people, but also shared rule between aboriginal people and the rest of Canada. We talked about a number of things. One of the things we talked about was perhaps having something like guaranteed seats, or if you're not going to change the Constitution, if you're going to go short of that, then obviously the recommendation made by electoral reform recommended the possibility of, I think it was, eight aboriginal districts, rather than having guaranteed seats. I think it's something we need to look at.

At the time when the royal commission reported, which was 20 years ago in a month's time, we had maybe fewer than 20 members who had ever been elected in Canada up to that time. Obviously, we're doing better; in this House I notice we have quite a few more members, but it's still not really enough. So I recommend that you take a look at that section of our report and see if there's anything there that you can garner out of it that would be useful for you.

• (2040)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Georges Erasmus: We also recommended an aboriginal parliament, which would be a step on the way to a house of first peoples. The reason we did that was we thought aboriginal people have not been interested about going to Parliament; there's been a lot of mistrust and all the rest of it. Not only that, but a lot of aboriginal people are under the impression that the relationship they had with the crown is one that's nation to nation, and we should have a different kind of relationship.

So if the Senate is there to represent the regions and the provinces and all the rest of it, the Commons is there to represent the people, Canadians, well then, what about an idea of having a third house that represents the first peoples.

The Chair: I understand. Thank you.

Mr. Georges Erasmus: We have in the proposal a whole list of things we can do in the meantime—anything to do with treaties, self-government, the new land claims that are coming forth, any legislation of general application that would affect aboriginal people, section 35, the charter, and so forth. There's a whole list of things.

The Chair: You recommend that we maybe go back and have a look at the report.

Mr. Georges Erasmus: Also look at the electoral reform royal commission, because it actually dealt with what you could do now. The reason we recommend an aboriginal parliament is that you can do it with an act, with legislation. It could be a stepping stone. Twenty years ago we said you could start it with about 36 people. The way we did it, we said each province and territory would start with two members, and then you'd add a member for every 50,000 aboriginal people. Of course the numbers have changed.

The Chair: Yes, obviously there's some updating to do. Our analysts will go back and have a look at that.

Thank you, Chief Erasmus.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, Chief Erasmus.

What an honour it is that you came to an open mike. You should have been able to be here for 10 or 20 minutes as an expert witness. It's a real honour to have you here.

We have heard the recommendation. I believe it was Kirk Cameron, the former city councillor in Whitehorse, who told us specifically to go back and look at the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, so it's not the first time it's been directed.

But, again, *mahsi cho*.

The Chair: Thank you very much. It's very good to see you again.

Mr. Georges Erasmus: You're very welcome.

Good luck with your work. I'm very impressed that you're still meeting at this time of night.

The Chair: Thank you.

Marcelle Marion, go ahead please.

● (2045)

Ms. Marcelle Marion (As an Individual): It's such an honour to see so many MPs in the Northwest Territories. I think it's a first; I'm not sure, but it's amazing. Anyway, thank you so much for your work on this very important subject.

I too wanted to speak a little bit about the issue of aboriginal representation in our Parliament and in our electoral system and to see it improve. There are those studies that were pointed out. I'm not sure what the committee's going to do in terms of other new studies, but something I want to raise tonight is truth and reconciliation. I think it's important that you consider electoral reform in the context of a larger reconciliation agenda in Canada in a historic kind of way. I know that electoral voting wasn't really covered by truth and reconciliation, but some really important aspects of it can be reflected.

I think it's important that we have equity in our new system. I really believe in the MCS system. I'm sure you've heard about it. It's the made-in-Canada system. If it is made in Canada, then we need to have the aboriginal and the northern perspectives included. This is what I wanted to talk about today.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that internationally our electoral system has a really good reputation, so I wouldn't throw everything out with the bathwater and just say we hate our system. We need changes, of course, but we have a good reputation. I think we need to remember that.

The last thing I want to mention is that we're all operating under the idea that there is no perfect system. The fact is you can invent the best system possible, but if we're not careful about the financing laws regarding parties, then we're not necessarily going to get where we want to go. We have to be very careful about the financing laws of the parties.

I've been watching this on TV. Thank you so much for your wonderful work. I'm hoping to see great results

The Chair: Thank you for the attention you're giving to the issue, and for participating tonight.

Mr. Mark Bogan, go ahead.

Mr. Mark Bogan (As an Individual): Thank you to all the members and to everybody for doing this.

I wanted to touch base with you on the growing number of Canadians who choose not to vote. Many of us have campaigned for a long time to people like you. My issue happens to be a broken family law system and how our family is slated to die without really knowing our kids or not knowing where they are now and stuff like that.

Our campaign started in 1999. If you were to open your files, you'd see that we sent a signature sheet from all members of our family to the Canadian Senate and every MP in Ottawa, and to date we remain left out in the cold. The situation has become so bad that we're still in court after 24 years. We waited three and a half years for a hearing date, and we've waited three months for a court order. However, we've lost confidence that the court order is going to surface.

I wanted to touch base with you on people who, for a very long time, campaign to people like you. We haven't stopped. I tabled an almost 2,000-signature petition, with signatures from Hay River to Inuvik, with our last MP. He gave it no value. Monsieur Ste-Marie spoke about toeing the party line or actually giving your constituents some value. Our last MP toed the party line. It was labelled as one of the largest petitions ever tabled in the Northwest Territories. I thought it was a prominent issue, one as big as climate change.

When you look at the role of an MP to enhance a family or quality of life, or to actually give their constituents value, I can't identify a political party in Canada that does, with the exception of Elizabeth May. When your back is to the wall with the Liberals, the Conservatives, and the New Democratic Party, who are giving this no value, you lose confidence in the Canadian Parliament as a whole. I am another one of a group—there are many, many people like me—who are choosing to no longer vote because my vote has no value.

I'm sure there are a lot of systemic issues in Canada and a lot of advocacy groups that feel the same way, but when you've been at it as long as people like me have and you're going to die without knowing where your children even are, we have what I would say is a big systemic problem with the culture in Ottawa, right across the board. Maybe we want to take a look at that.

Merci. Good luck with this.

● (2050)

The Chair: Thanks very much, Mr. Bogan.

Karen Hamre is next. Go ahead, Ms. Hamre.

Ms. Karen Hamre (As an Individual): Thank you very much to the committee for their work and for coming here.

One of the questions that was put forward was, what makes the north any different? What could you take away from being in the north? A number of points have been raised about the rural aspects, the distances, and various things like that.

Here's what I would also add. Perhaps this has been brought up. I haven't listened to all the presentations. The representatives here also have to represent land in a different way than they do in most parts of Canada, where a piece of land is privately owned. That land in fact is represented by a person and a vote. Here, the vast proportion of our land is held collectively, either by the crown or by various first nations groups through land claim agreements. In effect, then, that doesn't have the same kind of voting power that you would have in much of Canada.

I think this is another reason that we should be looking at some increased participation and members for the Northwest Territories: because the people who are going to Parliament are representing the land in a very different way, the land that is not only for the aboriginal people but for those of us who choose to be northerners as well.

Quickly, a proportional system, from the research I've seen, would increase the number of women in Parliament, which I think is a good thing, and also minority members. I think that is good as well.

I think you guys have an extraordinarily difficult job to do with all the input you have, so in that regard, I'm not in favour of a referendum, because the weighting of all the information that you're taking from across the country is extraordinarily difficult. I'm glad to see a very diverse representation around the table to do that.

Our important needs rest in your hands.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that perspective.

Go ahead, Ms. Joldersma.

Ms. Hermina Joldersma (As an Individual): I'm very supportive of electoral reform, probably the mixed member proportional, which will result in as close to the number of seats in the House reflecting the popular vote as possible.

Many things have been said today, but two things in particular haven't been raised in a way that I think is valid. It's been suggested that a ballot for MMP would be so complicated that Canadians would have difficulty with it. I just had a look at the German ballot, which I'm most familiar with, and it is not rocket science. I don't think Germans are smarter than Canadians, on average. I think Canadians would in fact be able to understand a ballot that's different from first past the post.

I'm familiar with the Dutch and the German parliamentary debates. I speak both of those languages and listen to their debates sometimes. The level of debate in their parliaments makes our Parliament, what we see of it as Canadians watching TV, look like grade 1 out of control. Again, it's not because our parliamentarians are not as smart, or as nice, or as kind. I think our system promotes bad behaviour by parliamentarians.

I think mixed member proportional, when people would be forced to talk to each other in a civilized fashion because they needed their vote for a bill down the road, would improve politics in Canada immeasurably.

Thank you.

•(2055)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Ms. Pelova.

Ms. Maria Pelova (As an Individual): I also want to thank you for coming all the way up to the very remote north and for working so hard and staying so late to listen to a few of us who have the ability to express our thoughts on our electoral system.

A lot of what was said by Mr. Lambrecht and Mr. Wasylciw have expressed my thoughts. I also want to share just a few personal thoughts on how I felt a couple of years ago, when I knew absolutely no person in my surroundings who felt represented. We all felt trapped. We saw nothing of what we thought, said, or valued in what our government was doing. We felt helpless, with no influence over it in any way.

In the first-past-the-post-system, it often seems like a race between mostly two parties, and the two biggest parties. You vote for one or against one. If you have any thoughts or ideas that are different from that, they will probably never see the world. You never have a representative who can speak for how you feel.

I have no idea what the best electoral system would be, but you guys, with your intelligence and your skills, are up here to figure that out. I just wanted to share my personal experience. I hope you find a way to represent most Canadians.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you for those words of encouragement.

Yes, we do have a big task ahead of us, but I think we're working well together. I hold out a lot of hope that we'll produce a great report.

Ms. Vail, you are the final presenter.

Ms. Nancy Vail (As an Individual): Thank you, as well, for coming up here.

It's great when people from the south can come up to the north and hear from us about our special needs, because we have many special needs. We are a sparse population on a vast tract of land. Many times we wonder what we're doing here, because we pay a price for being up here.

I would like to impress upon you a couple of things. One is that, in the north, because of our being drawn to the land in the way we are, there is a saying up here that you don't own the land; the land owns you. That's why we're here, and that's part of our dedication to the land. I hope that you will keep that in mind when you are considering issues of the north.

The other thing I want to say is, even though we have this small body of people up here, we have some of the hugest issues plaguing Canada right now. The suicide rates among our young people are the highest anywhere in Canada. This is an epidemic in the territories and Nunavut, as you may have heard. We may have this small body of people, but we have huge issues with our people. In Nunavut, we have many stories about them going to the dump to find food. That's how bad things get up here.

In the last election, I worked as an elections officer. I don't know what was happening in the communities, but those votes were so important to people. If they had any trouble getting to the polling station, they were desperate to call in to find out how they could get that one little vote in that ballot box, because that is their ticket to Canada. They love Canada and they want to participate. That little vote is their ticket for their children, and is part of this nation. They may be in remote communities, and they may not speak your

language, but they consider themselves just as much a part of this country as anybody else.

On a parting note, I would just ask that you keep that in your hearts when you're making these decisions.

That's all. Thank you.

The Chair: Those are wise words, and very impactful. Thank you very much.

That essentially closes our day here in Yellowknife. Thank you for your hospitality and for your insight.

Personally speaking, and I know I speak for the other members, I hope we get back here soon in some capacity.

Thank you. Have a good night.

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