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Chair

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia

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• (1335)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order.

We're going to start the meeting now. I just have a few housekeeping matters to raise regarding the use of these microphones. They cannot be activated from behind me, so when you speak, you'll have to press the button. Also, we have three simultaneous interpretation channels. Number one is for Inuktitut, number two is for English,

[Translation]

while channel 4 is for French. If you want to listen to the floor, without interpretation, go to channel 3.

[English]

I would like to welcome our colleague the Honourable Hunter Tootoo here today. Thank you for joining us.

We have a full house ready to go. We have with us for the first panel Mr. James Arreak, chief executive officer, executive services of the Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., and the organization's legal counsel, John Merritt, is here with us as well. Welcome. We also have, from the Nunavut Association of Municipalities, Mr. Brian Fleming, who is the executive director.

I'll explain the way we function. This, by the way, is our last day on the road. We've had three weeks of travel. We've done all provinces, and this will be the third territory that we've travelled to for hearings. The way it works is after witness testimony, we have one round of questioning from the members. Each member gets to engage with the witnesses for five minutes.

We'll start with Mr. Arreak and Mr. Merritt, for 10 minutes in total. Go ahead, sir.

Mr. James Arreak (Chief Executive Officer, Executive Services, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.) (Interpretation): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will make some brief remarks in Inuktitut.

Thank you to the public meeting of the House of Commons special committee and the federal electoral representatives, and welcome to Nunavut on behalf of Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, Cathy Towtongie, and the Board of Directors of NTI. Welcome to Iqaluit, and we do appreciate that you invited us to the meeting of the House of Commons special committee on electoral reform.

I will go back to English.

We're pleased that you have come here to hear what we have to say about the federal electoral system. Any reform of our federal democratic institutions, particularly our electoral system, affects all Canadians, particularly those Canadians who are also members of an aboriginal people, as we are. Your work is important to us.

That said, in common with many other Canadians, we would not define any reform of the federal electoral system as a core organizational function. We do not have a finely worked out official position on this topic built around extensive discussions or debates backed up by carefully phrased AGM or boards of directors resolutions.

We do, however, appreciate this process being conducted in an open and informal manner. In the spirit of shared exploration, there are some points and preferences, by way of context and outlook, that we would like to raise with you.

NTI represents all of Nunavut Inuit for all purposes associated with the Nunavut land agreement that we signed with the crown in right of Canada in 1993.

The Nunavut agreement is a modern treaty, or land claim agreement, for the purposes of section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. In addition to our treaty rights, Inuit have retained aboriginal rights in matters not governed by the Nunavut agreement.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the Nunavut agreement is fully respected and implemented.

Article 4 of the Nunavut agreement provides for the creation of the territory of Nunavut. Getting article 4 was a very hard struggle for Inuit, but we succeeded, and through it, Nunavut was created on April 1, 1999.

We have experienced colonialism, with all of its attendant problems: laws imposed from outside, loss of control over resources, lack of respect for our languages, and residential schools. It is a formidable list.

We know what it looks like to be outside the electoral system looking in. It was not until the 1962 federal election that all Inuit in Nunavut were allowed to vote. Until 1979 there was only one MP for the entire Northwest Territories.

We are aware of the problems posed in our history, but we are not trapped or paralyzed by them.

We are determined to overcome the negative aspects of our history of colonization. We are particularly mindful of the need for Canada to define its democratic processes and institutions in ways that are as inclusive as possible. While key democratic values and principles are universal in content, they must be expressed in ways that are tolerant, adaptable, and creative.

The Constitution Act, 1982, defines the aboriginal peoples of Canada as Inuit, Indian, and Métis people. It's been acknowledged that the constitutional rights of aboriginal peoples extend to include an inherent right of self-government.

• (1340)

Accordingly, aboriginal peoples are not just holders of common law rights to make use of land and resources; rather, we must be seen as peoples who are fundamentally constituent parts of our national identity and fabric.

New Zealand, for example, is a country with many similarities to Canada. It has provided for direct Maori representation at its Parliament from its early days, and has retained that feature of its democratic life. Accordingly, each of Canada's three aboriginal peoples should have direct representation in a reformed House of Commons. Representation in the range of two to four representatives from each of Canada's three aboriginal peoples would roughly track the New Zealand precedent.

Aboriginal peoples' representatives should be elected by aboriginal electors. In the case of the Inuit of Inuit Nunangat, the four regions that make up the Arctic homeland in Canada, the electorate would logically be made up of all these people who live here, are of adult voting age, and are enrolled in the four treaties governing Inuit Nunangat.

There is no reason that aboriginal peoples' representatives need to be elected on the occasion of federal general elections. For reasons of continuity of representation, it would be a considerable advantage to have such representatives elected for fixed terms. Perhaps six years would be advantageous, with staggered terms similar to the United States Senate. In the absence of elections being tied to overly partisan general elections, there would be an enhanced argument for us for using a ranked ballot system to ensure at least 50% support.

In the case of Nunavut's geography, even the quickest glance at the electoral map of Canada reveals that the riding of Nunavut is, by far, the largest. It is almost impossible to overstate the sheer size of Nunavut. Entire regions of Canada would fit comfortably into Nunavut. Much of western Europe would fit into Nunavut. Nunavut covers three time zones.

Unlike larger ridings in Canada, the population in Nunavut is not heavily concentrated in one or two large population centres. Rather, the population of Nunavut is spread over 26 communities with important distinctions as to their physical, socio-economic, and cultural environments. Nunavut has been energetically served by its MPs—thank you to Hunter Tootoo—but the travel demands on them, both in terms of sheer distance and the infrequency and unpredictability of air routes, are extraordinary and excessive.

Democratic values are not well served by having a constituency of such extreme geographic size that anyone not enjoying peak health or not willing to risk basic health can be excluded from running for

office. For these reasons, electoral reform should bring about the division of the single Nunavut riding into two smaller ridings.

We suggest two MPs for each territory and for Nunavut. Quite apart from Nunavut's unique size, there is a good argument that all provinces and territories should have a minimum of two MPs. Having two MPs can accurately reflect a diversity of views. In the event of illness or an absence of one MP from Ottawa, the jurisdiction would still have representation.

There is plenty of precedent on this point. Looking back in parliamentary history, we see that two-member representation—two for each shire, borough, and two old established universities—was the rule at Westminster in England from the Middle Ages until the 19th century. It is my understanding that two-member constituencies were also part of elections in Canada as late as the 1960s. Of course, the U.S. Senate is still structured around two senators for each state in the union.

There are costs related to campaigning in Nunavut. Healthy democratic engagement requires that there be a reasonable opportunity for candidates to interact at a personal level during campaigning, yet the cost of airfare in Nunavut is prohibitive to many potential candidates.

• (1345)

In the past, airlines serving Nunavut have been willing, on a non-partisan basis, to assist candidates by offering free seats when they were available. That has been welcomed, but considerations of fairness and predictability suggest that reasonably foreseeable transportation costs in Nunavut must be met by some form of public subsidy. The availability of such subsidies should be confined to the candidates of those parties who secure a minimum percentage of the popular vote.

On alternative general designs of the electoral system, we understand that many Canadians are unhappy with the existing manner in which MPs are elected. The first-past-the-post system can skew the vote at a national level heavily toward one party or another. In Nunavut, our election results have sometimes shown a three-way split. In other years, the choice has been very clear, and a modified voting system would probably not have affected that result. NTI does not detect any great groundswell of opinion either in favour of retaining or of modifying the first-past-the-post system. We suspect that most Inuit see both advantages and disadvantages in the current system. We would like to hear and know more, and are keeping open minds.

One alternative to the first-past-the-post system is the ranked candidate system, with each elector numbering candidates in order of preference, and then the votes of candidates with fewer first preferences being tabulated and redistributed until one candidate is the ranked choice of at least 50% of the electors. This system has the virtue of overcoming one defect of the first-past-the-post system: in a first-past-the-post contest, a person can be elected having extreme positions that may appeal to a minority of voters that are heartily rejected by a majority. The ranked candidate system appears to be more in keeping with the premium placed on consensus-building and the preference for inclusiveness that is characteristic of Inuit culture.

We understand the ranked candidate system is used by the Australian House of Representatives and in other parts of the world and that it appears to work well in those places. In the event that another electoral design system is to be adopted, the ranked candidate system would seem to best fit Nunavut.

France has a variation on the ranked candidate system, using run-off elections several weeks after general elections to choose between the top two candidates where no candidate secured a majority of votes in the general election. This variation may deserve some further examination, although the extra costs might be quite considerable.

With regard to proportional representation by party vote, we are aware that some Canadians favour having MPs elected entirely by party lists according to overall national party votes, or having a mixed member proportional system, as they have in Germany and New Zealand, with some MPs elected in first-past-the-post constituencies and others through a nationally calculated top-up based on overall party votes.

It is difficult to see how either forms of a system like this could work for Nunavut. Having MPs elected entirely from party lists would remove the ability of Inuit to evaluate the particular strengths and weaknesses of individual candidates, and that first-hand evaluation—that personal touch—is highly compatible with our values and experience. We would also not be comfortable with a system that makes it hard to identify the MP or MPs who have particular responsibilities on our behalf.

● (1350)

MMP, as I highlighted, would seem to be slightly more appealing, but it has the major difficulty of setting up a two-class tier of MPs, with some MPs excused from the constituency work that keeps them busy but that also keeps them grounded and informed. Given Nunavut's small population size, adding extra MPs based on national party vote totals would diminish Nunavut's relative voice.

When it comes to gender-based representation, not all members of the committee may be aware, but prior to Nunavut's creation in 1993, a referendum was held on creating an electoral system that would guarantee equal numbers of male and female MLAs in a gender-balanced legislature. Equal numbers of male and female MLAs would be brought about by having two member constituencies, with male and female candidates grouped on separate lists and with all voters allowed to cast a vote against each. In the event, the referendum rejected this system by a fairly narrow vote.

It would appear that the gender-based approach looked at the world view of females and also the very different world views that males have. That was used as a reason to represent these people.

It would not appear that the issue of securing a better balance of men and women in Parliament has figured prominently in the current process, but the committee may well wish to look further into Nunavut's experience in this respect.

A good article about the Nunavut referendum has been published, and we brought some extra copies if any of you would like to get a copy of it.

As for securing public endorsement, there has been some talk of organizing a national referendum or plebiscite before making any changes to the electoral system. We saw complex constitutional issues put to a national referendum on the Charlottetown Accord, which failed, of course. As well, proposals to electoral changes in B. C., Ontario, and other provinces have failed to win support. Reaching back in Canadian history, we understand that the national vote on the conscription issue was a very difficult one for Canada during World War II.

The Inuit of Quebec and throughout Nunangat are very much aware of some of the negative dimensions of the Quebec referendums in 1980 and 1995. Given the small population weight of Nunavut in Canada, our voice would be a very small one in any national referendum or plebiscite. That would be an important drawback in itself.

The larger and more compelling drawback to a referendum would be its potential to divide Canadians from one another, reopen old lines of division, and create new ones. There is always an opportunity for mischief in any single-question, win-or-lose campaign.

Rather than having a referendum, due respect for democratic process and for our parliamentary history would be shown by having each majority party adopt a clear position on a detailed program for electoral reform prior to the next federal election and then let the voters make their judgments on those proposals as part of casting their votes. In that fashion, the next Parliament would have a mandate to proceed.

In conclusion, Canada is a remarkably diverse country with many important and pronounced regional, linguistic, social, and cultural differences. One of the bedrock diversities of our country is the presence and the role of Canada's three aboriginal peoples.

Whatever is crafted to improve the representativeness of our political system, it must work effectively and fairly for both aboriginal and non-aboriginal Canadians, for the Arctic and the south, and for the territories as well as the provinces.

● (1355)

I end with some conclusions in my language.

Lastly, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the special committee for coming to our community. In doing the committee on electoral reform, I hope you have a very successful electoral reform. It's going to benefit the Canadian public as well as the territories.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's all I have.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Arreak. That was a very rich testimony that dug very much into the core of the matter. I can see that our researchers are thrilled with your brief; you've given them a lot to get their hands on.

We'll now go to Mr. Fleming from the Nunavut Association of Municipalities. Go ahead, Mr. Fleming, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Brian Fleming (Executive Director, Nunavut Association of Municipalities): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Nunavut Association of Municipalities represents 25 municipalities in Nunavut. Each mayor is a member of NAM. In preparing for our testimony here, to be honest, our mayors are very practical people in Nunavut, and for good reason, but we got lost in talking about the electoral designs, proportional representation and stuff, so I don't have a lot of comments on that because as a board we just backed away from that whole thing.

I do have four comments from our board, and I'd like to pass those on to you. The first is on electronic voting.

Everybody agreed that would be a good thing, but before it can happen in Nunavut, there would have to be a substantial upgrade to the Internet infrastructure, and probably before we got into that, some kind of Canadian standard would have to be set so that everybody could participate equally. I know the Internet connections up north here from Grise Fiord to Kugliktuk really vary. I could imagine on election night they'd probably be jammed right up in light of the infrastructure.

Second, we did talk about mandatory voting, and we don't support mandatory voting at this time. I know there's a whole range of constitutional issues regarding it, but if there was mandatory voting, the mayors wondered how it would be enforced and monitored, because up north here people could come up with a whole range of excuses: couldn't find a babysitter, had an accident on the way to the polling station, or perhaps the weather is bad, which is not uncommon in the north.

Third, we focused on Senate reform, and everybody believed that the Senate should be an elected body.

Fourth, the last item we discussed was similar to what NTI mentioned here, but we arrived at it completely independently. It was that the mayors felt that in territories such as Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and even perhaps looking at northern Quebec—Nunavik—and Labrador, if there's a way to establish a minimum of two candidates per riding, that should just be put in there. The mayors felt that would be a more accountable arrangement and it wouldn't leave us hanging onto one candidate, which is how we operate right now.

Those are our comments. I don't think I stretched it out to 10 minutes, but that's okay. I'm available to answer any questions anyone may have.

Thank you very much.

•(1400)

The Chair: Thank you very much. There was considerable insight into the issues of mandatory voting and online voting. We appreciate that perspective.

We'll move now to our round of questions, starting with Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

It's a real treat to be in Nunavut today. I know the whole committee has been really excited about our trip up here. Most of us, myself included, have never travelled this far up north, and it's been fascinating. Thank you for having us.

Mr. Arreak, you and Mr. Fleming suggested that there be a minimum of two MPs. I completely understand. I know we got a sense of this when we were in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, because the territories are so large. It would be very hard, I imagine, for an MP to be able to get to all the communities. If this were to happen, would you like to see it happen within the current first-past-the-post system, where you have just the two ridings, or with the ranking system you were suggesting, or would you want to see that second MP brought in under some kind of proportional system?

I know there have been ideas thrown out that perhaps you could maintain your one MP, and then maybe the northern regions could be combined and a couple of MPs could be thrown in for proportional purposes. How would you feel about the northern regions being combined, if that was how we could add the other MPs on?

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arreak.

Mr. James Arreak: That's a good question, and I'm going to invite my colleague John Merritt to contribute to the discussion.

From our perspective, the idea of two MPs representing Nunavut is much like us depending on one satellite. There were a couple of dark days when that satellite went sideways and no longer could communicate. Those were dark days for Nunavut. Nobody could talk to anybody in the world. We had no voice through telephone, email, fax, you name it. All telecommunications were down. That's kind of the same argument that we're trying to make, having one MP but proposing two. One could be general and the other one could be an aboriginal representative. It's just a thought that came forward. For here, having one MP has a reality to it that I think we should be mindful of.

I'm going to ask my colleague to contribute further.

•(1405)

Mr. John Merritt (Legal Counsel, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc.): Thank you, Chair.

When we were developing our brief, we were mindful that there's a great potential for any reforms to become too complicated for Canadians to track and be comfortable with. There's an advantage in trying to make reforms as simple as possible. When it came to the electoral system, we anticipated having the same system applying across the country in respect of Canadians having access to a first-past-the-post system or a ranked ballot.

The only exception we made to that, which was flagged in Mr. Arreak's brief, was in relation to direct aboriginal representation. There we think there might be an opportunity to elect Inuit members on a slightly different basis that would be relevant for the geographically elected members. If we were to introduce a second or third variation or have MPs elected by geography composed of the entire three territories, we think that would be a very complicated system. I think we should just go back to basics, to the principles we've been trying to follow. There'd be some disadvantages, of course.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: If I understand you correctly, you think we should create a quota of some sort to have a certain number of aboriginal seats assigned to the House, whether they be Inuit, or Métis, or others. There are so many.... I don't know how we would solve that problem across the country, but they would be specifically aboriginal seats. Do you agree with that?

Mr. James Arreak: Yes. You could look at it geographically or base it on the number of modern treaties you have on file. I don't know if that would make any sense, but I think there are about 26 modern treaties. Then there are co-management regimes built into some of these modern treaties. Sometimes when you're trying to manage wildlife or other types of resources, it's important to be able to talk together as co-managers on resources that are important.

When it comes to land, for example, the way we see land is quite different. From a policy point of view, the government tends to see land as an asset, as something you manage, but Inuit see land as a living partner that has to be cared for, not just as a physical asset. When it comes to co-management, being able to communicate these types of variances would really be helpful when it comes to trying to pass things like legislation or new regulations. Really, there are those kinds of issues that I think the government has to consider when—

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Could I have a quick 30 seconds? I'm very curious about this point.

The Chair: You have 15 seconds. Go ahead.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It won't be about systems. It's just about my general knowledge of the territory. Is the population centred around a certain area of the territory? There are 25 communities, and about 32,000 people. Are they dispersed all around, or are they—

• (1410)

Mr. James Arreak: Yes, there are three regions in Nunavut, and Iqaluit is the largest community, with 7,000 people. Then I would say Rankin and Cambridge are the other regional centres. Some might argue that Arviat is the second largest, but—

The Chair: We have to go, Ms. Sahota. We have to go to Mr. Reid now. Thank you so much for that clarification, Mr. Arreak.

Go ahead, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Kingston, CPC): I want to thank all of the witnesses for their very interesting testimony. I'm not sure who I should be thanking for the lovely weather. I got to go out and wander around town for about an hour and a half. It was really nice and really refreshing.

Mr. Arreak, I want to start by asking you a little bit about some of the things you said. This is why I had my computer open. While you were talking, I was looking up some population figures. Baked into the DNA of the House of Commons in Canada or, more correctly, baked into the constitutional provisions that structure the House of Commons is the concept of representation by population, the idea that all ridings should be roughly equivalent in size within a province. That's pretty much an ironclad rule across provinces. We allow for fluctuation, but as little as possible. Then an exception is made for the territories, because they are so much smaller.

This raises a question. I actually have three questions. I'll read them to you at all once, because I think it would be better if they were answered thematically.

The first is on having two MPs for Nunavut, if that's what you were advocating. Unless we greatly increased the number of members of Parliament elsewhere in the country, that would have the effect of causing a very significant disproportion and a departure from the principle of representation by population. That's the first thought on which I would invite your comment.

Second, when you talk about the idea of having three members of Parliament who would serve as the parallel of the Maori seats in New Zealand, presumably one for each of the three general groupings, I assume you meant Inuit, Métis, and first nations as the three groups. There are two basic problems that I can see constitutionally with this. The first is that there's no provision in the Canadian constitution that permits seats that overlap provincial boundaries.

You could in theory have a single member of Parliament representing multiple territories. We asked about that in the other territories, and people weren't very enthusiastic about it. Of course, a large number of Inuit people live in northern Quebec and also in Newfoundland and Labrador. Geographically I could see how that would work, but constitutionally, there is a hard impediment to it.

The other problem I see with this is just a matter of fairness and the idea of representation by population. Wikipedia says there are 59,445 Inuit people in Canada—I guess that's as of the last census—451,000 Métis, and 851,000 people from first nations. You can see a substantial disproportion.

I realize I'm giving a very mechanistic interpretation of what you're saying. The distinction between this and the Maori in New Zealand is that the Maori are essentially one ethnicity. They have different tribes that used to fight each other, but they are one ethnicity, and that makes things a great deal simpler.

I throw out those problems to you and I'm looking for your feedback as to how you would respond to them.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Arreak.

Mr. James Arreak: *Qujannamiik*. Thank you for your question.

Many times I've sat here trying to dialogue with the federal government and trying to be a voice, because we are told we have the right to work with governments as per our land claims, right? The promise of the crown says the Inuit would participate in the political...I don't know if "political development" is the right expression, or "political representation", in discussing what our issues are. How does that work? I think having the one MP is only one example.

Then we're left with having to try to, out of the kindness of the minister of INAC, funnel through her and other ministers who have their obligations but also a keenness about the north. We're kind of faced with that reality every day, and then to try to propose a representative system that works....

The rule book has been thrown back at us many times. Government is supposed to be representative of the majority of the people, and through you, our Government of Nunavut. You look at the way it functions and you see it functions nowhere near the values that the majority of the people who live here believe in. How could this imposed government work for the Inuit? That is what we've tried to think about, and we're trying to throw back at you: it's a "here's what we're thinking" kind of thing. It's a double-edged sword, I understand, but at the same time....

I could ramble, but I'm going to get John to maybe contribute to the discussion.

• (1415)

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you, sir.

I would make the observation that I think the principle of the equality of every voter is not an absolute. Certainly we haven't followed that in Canada from 1867 on. We do, I think, in the design of Parliament, the House of Commons, treat the equality of voters as the core principle, and then we make conscious variations from that to accommodate regional and other differences. At the moment I believe Prince Edward Island would actually have more over-representation than Nunavut would if you divided the population of P.E.I. into its four seats.

Mr. Scott Reid: You're correct about that. I just wanted to say, though, that there was a special amendment made to the Constitution to permit that to happen for Prince Edward Island. In fact, this gives me a chance to ask this: are you advocating that we should be considering such an amendment that would allow this to be achieved? We might have to do that.

Mr. John Merritt: I take your point about there being a constitutional basis for P.E.I.'s particular case. In our brief, of course, we said that section 35—recognizing the existence in Canada of the aboriginal peoples—of course is a constitutional foundation as to why that reality of Canada should also be reflected in the makeup of the House of Commons. Whether you need a specific constitutional amendment to justify one or more of the measures we're talking about, I would say we didn't track through the downstream constitutional implications of everything in our brief, and undoubtedly you'd want to get further advice on that point.

Would the principle of relative equality of representation be violated by extra representation of Inuit along one of the lines we've talked about? I don't think so. I think the courts in Canada have been quite willing to introduce a fair bit of flexibility in terms of justifiable variations on the core rule of equality of representation, but clearly, if the committee were to adopt any of these measures, you'd want to satisfy yourselves further with some explicit research on that point.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you very much, Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses today, and also thank you to our friend Hunter, who is here as well.

I can only imagine some of the thoughts going through your head, Hunter, when we talk about the size of this riding and just the mere logistics of getting around, and it's reflected in some of our testimony today. I used to think my riding in northern British Columbia was big, but 320,000 square kilometres doesn't seem like much when we're up here in a 2 million square kilometre territory.

I'll start with you, Mr. Arreak. You spoke of the challenges, particularly around first nations' voices in Canada at this particular time. I think a number of the issues that we face as a country.... Someone commented recently that we can't become the country we're meant to be until we begin to actually resolve this conversation. I very much agree with that.

We were looking at New Zealand. You're one of the few witnesses who has suggested an actual representation directly from Métis, Inuit, and first nations Canadians. I didn't hear it in your testimony, but just mechanically, would you imagine that those voters would have a choice? They could vote for an Inuit candidate in the general election, or.... I assume you don't mean two votes for all those Canadians who are.... I wonder how you're imagining this working, mechanically.

• (1420)

Mr. James Arreak: I think it would be like any election. You would come up with a nomination period in which a number of aboriginal people, if it were just for aboriginal seats, were listed. For us, the Nunavut electorate, anybody can run, for example. Then, as in any campaign period, they campaign, and then people have the option. In order to be consistent, I think that's how it would work mechanically.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Would they be listed by party, or would they essentially be independents? I don't know if you've thought.... I may be going too deeply down the road here.

Mr. James Arreak: I'm not sure. That's something probably more for discussion, but if it's an aboriginal voice, then.... Here in Nunavut we select our government, and it's not partisan, so I would imagine something like that. I don't know if that would break any federal rules or regulations, but something like that might work. It's still up for further discussion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: We've looked at the New Zealand model as well for a number of different reasons, but one of them was around how the Maori fare. New Zealand is comparable, and yet is not. They have one distinct group and a long history of having dedicated seats, since 1867, I think.

One thing we've noticed, though, is the change that New Zealand went through in going to a proportional system. The Maori were always—even with those dedicated seats—dramatically under-represented in the legislature. It was a ceiling, and the Maori never got beyond it. In the seven elections since they changed to proportional, Maori have either matched or exceeded representation in the legislature.

What is the change that we're looking to make? We actually have talked quite a bit about gender and how the House of Commons is doing on a gender basis. We haven't heard testimony yet about the matching idea, that there would be a man-woman component, yet we also know that in many systems, the proportion of women.... Since our proportion is very low right now in Canada, I think it hurts us on many levels of policy-making and culture.

That's more food for thought.

Maybe we could have a quick comment from Mr. Fleming around electronic voting, and I wonder if Mr. Arreak would support this. It has been promoted for a couple of advantages. Maybe there would be more young people, or maybe it would help those living remotely or people who have access or mobility issues.

There have been two big downsides. One is about security, about how you stop an election from being hacked or delayed, and the second one is equal access to the Internet.

I don't know if the association of municipalities has an estimate of what it would cost to bring the territory's municipalities up to a code at which people, if they wanted to vote online, could know that the system was not going to crash because the satellite turned three degrees.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Fleming.

Mr. Brian Fleming: That's a good question.

I think the Internet is widely used in the north. It's kind of a made-for-the-north technology, because the geographical costs of going to Toronto or Hamilton or wherever are huge, but you can experience whatever is in Hamilton and Toronto through the Internet.

If we did implement Internet voting, then you may want to consider having at the polling station something like what we call up here CAP sites, but bring in the computers and that kind of thing. That might be an alternative.

In making those comments, I wasn't expecting to rush out and say we're going to go with electronic voting from now on, but just to suggest that it work that way.

I don't think that computers are the issue up north, because I think a fair number of people have them. It's the infrastructure, especially on voting night, with so much news going through the Internet and so on.

• (1425)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Good afternoon, gentlemen.

An interpreter informed me earlier that there was a funeral at this time for an important leader from your community, or at least that is what I understood. And so I want to extend my sincere condolences, and thank you for being here today.

I want to greet my colleagues, particularly Mr. Hunter Tootoo, as well as the members of the team.

All through the consultations we have held in the provinces and territories, we have mostly heard about the need to increase the proportionality of the electoral system.

[*English*]

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Mr. Chair, there is no translation.

The Chair: One moment.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: I could talk and Ms. May could translate.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: I missed that part, but the interpretation is working now.

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

As I was saying, in most of our meetings, people have recommended that we opt for a reform that would allow for increased proportionality. People spoke about a mixed proportional system, and other similar systems. Since we have heard little from you on this topic, I would like to hear your respective points of view.

I will also ask you a question that goes to the heart of the issue: if the reform of the system led to increased proportionality, would you prefer that the current voting system be maintained in the three territories, or that a proportional system be adopted, with three MPs for all of the territories?

[*English*]

Mr. James Arreak: Qujannamiik. Thank you for that question, and thanks to Ms. May for facilitating some of it.

First of all, thank you for your condolences. I think Mr. Pearson has left his mark with the people. It is a very sad and happy day for us, happy for him and sad for us.

It's really difficult. When we say "proportional", is that something that you guarantee has to be Inuk? For example, in Nunavut, to run for office, we're really happy that Hunter is Inuk, but some years it wasn't an Inuk, and so it was difficult.

I was really encouraged to hear that you are looking at some of the barriers to representation. I commented about women having a different world view, and they face the glass ceiling corporate-wise and politically. In Nunavut, the majority of the breadwinners are now women, and they're single mothers. How do we equip them to help us address some of the day-to-day challenges they face in trying to put food on the table? How can we use the tools that government has in their hands to make it better for the people who live here?

That's often the challenge, I think. That's why Nunavut took seriously the idea of two forms, with the male and the female in representation, because we thought that in our world Inuit women see the world differently from the men who were predominantly in authority positions, but now it's women that are really disproportionately represented. They are the ones who are carrying the weight of the families in Nunavut.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Fleming, you have the floor.

[English]

Mr. Brian Fleming: Chair, thanks for the question.

In light of the vast territories we have, I think the main thing we're trying to emphasize here is whether we can get two MPs and whether, as was suggested earlier, it would require an amendment to the legislation or something. I think that's the main thing we're looking for. As for the design of the system, whether it's first past the post or a proportional system, I would leave that to the committee, because it's the committee that's going to have to sell that to the rest of Canada.

If you want to, say, recommend that the territories have a minimum of two MPs, and then you also propose that we totally transform the electoral system to move away from first past the post to a proportional system, a bloc system, or a ranked system, it might be too much for the country to handle all at once.

I'd leave that to the committee. I think the main thing we're looking for is two representatives per territory. Those are my comments.

• (1430)

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

To conclude, I'd like to ask Mr. Arreak a question.

Mr. Fleming was talking about the Senate, and about electing senators. What are your thoughts on that?

Would it be a good idea to reserve seats in the Senate for first nations and Inuit members?

[English]

Mr. James Arreak: Yes, on the idea of the Senate, someone once told me that they are supposed to be the sober mind of Canadians, and I think it wouldn't hurt. Since you asked me, yes, absolutely, it would be helpful to have Inuit to help the senators discuss the issues at hand from their perspective.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Thank you, Chair. Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

I have had the great honour and privilege of having been here before. The first time was in 1986, when the minister I was working with was Tagak Curley, for the creation of Ellesmere Island National Park Reserve. I've had great fortune to be able to travel this land. Few Canadians have had this opportunity.

I've been fortunate also to work with your president, I believe, Cathy Towtongie. I worked with her at COP 21 in Paris. There has

been a lot of climate leadership from Inuit people. I'm very drawn to your proposals.

It may just be because I'm the Green Party that I don't think it's a bad idea that caribou and polar bears should be represented in our Parliament. Maybe that's too much for most people, but I think that when you're looking at a land mass and you look at it as a partner instead of as an asset, it changes perspective in a very powerful way.

I want to let you know that although we are here, so far from southern Canada, a lot of Canadians are actually listening to us live. They don't have video, but they are watching Twitter. There are a lot of people who like what you just said. They like the idea that land is a partner.

I want to go to the New Zealand model because you expressed a lot of skepticism about how mixed member proportional might work for Canada. I know, thanks to knowing Cathy Towtongie, that Inuit do not want to be described as a first nation. She was very clear on that. This is a different relationship. It's community partners, as Canadians first, but with a perspective that needs to be heard.

First of all, I should tell you that one of our expert witnesses, Sean Graham from Alberta, actually has advocated this to us on the record, so you're not the first witnesses to suggest that there should be two members for each of the territories. It goes right against our principles of representation by population, but his model, which is one of the ones we're looking at, would put two ridings together across most of Canada and still have two MPs. One would be elected the current way and one would be representative of proportionality, but to make that work he was suggesting we would put two MPs for Nunavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon.

The other model, of course, is mixed member proportional, under which, as we were discussing, in New Zealand the seats for Maori have been there for quite a number of years. They have a minimum guaranteed number of seven seats for which only Maori voters can make those choices, but due to mixed member proportional, Maori MPs are also being elected in the proportionality system, so that right now the number of Maori members of Parliament perfectly reflects the proportion of the population of New Zealand that is Maori.

I want to go back for a bit more discussion on whether you could see some form of a system, when we're reforming our voting system, that had reserved seats for indigenous peoples but didn't make divisions along ethnicity lines. That is, for purposes of getting a voice out there, we would ask Inuit, Métis, and first nations people to vote for Inuit, Métis, and first nations representatives without breaking that down. Would that be feasible? Do you have any thoughts on that?

• (1435)

Mr. James Arreak: I think it is great to see this relationship coming from the federal government between the crown and the first peoples, with the first peoples being a party.

How does that filter down into the electoral system? As we said, we have Hunter who got in through the current process that we have. Second, having an Inuk guarantees that there will be the Inuit voice. I think it's not a bad idea that this committee should consider. However, as I said, our organization hasn't really discussed this formally, so I would not want to put too much weight behind that other than to say that I think it's a great idea when you go down this path, because it's thinking outside the box and it's trying to figure out how to honour the new relationship between the crown and its first peoples.

Mr. John Merritt: I would reinforce the general proposition that if one introduced a mixed member electoral model and made no other adjustments, it's possible that representation in a Parliament would actually go down. That's because if you add to the current complement of MPs—if you add another 60 or 80 MPs—and there's one MP from Nunavut, unless there's some high level of predictability that Inuit are going to figure on those party lists, it's possible that a reformed system for the House of Commons would actually deliver less by way of Inuit representation. Clearly, that would not be, from an Inuit perspective, a desirable result.

That said, if one accepts that as a possibility, there are only two ways of fixing that situation. One way is to introduce rules that define the party in terms of the priority they attach to the candidates on the top-up list, and I think that from NTI's point of view, we'd be somewhat nervous to start suggesting how a party should run itself in a democratic system. I think there's a fair bit of constraint on our side as to how intrusive one would want to be in terms of how parties conduct themselves.

Of course, one could come up with other features of electoral systems, as I think you're suggesting, that would provide Inuit with additional assurances they would need, so we've offered a number of ways of doing that. One would be to look at the special geography of Nunavut. One would be to introduce MPs who would represent Inuit as one of the three aboriginal peoples of Canada. There are a number of techniques you could use, but it would be important to adopt something that would accept that a reformed House of Commons should actually provide Inuit with more assurances that they're being well represented.

The Chair: Thank you—

Mr. John Merritt: I would just make one observation, sir. We've made reference to the New Zealand system, but we're aware that when it was first introduced in New Zealand, the Maoris were approximately half the population. This was not introduced as a generous gesture; this was essentially giving a half the population only four seats. It was a cap. It was a ceiling. It wasn't a phase.

I appreciate that the motivation in New Zealand today is obviously radically different in terms of the justification.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Aldag is next.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): This has been very interesting.

I want to start by clarifying and building on what we've been hearing from a number of the discussions already, and it's simply that we've heard two different versions. One would be to take the

territory and divide it into two because of the geography. The other would be to have two members for the existing one riding. What would be the benefits or strengths and weaknesses? Maybe both Mr. Arreak and Mr. Fleming could speak to that, because I think there would be a different approach there. Would one be preferred over the other?

• (1440)

Mr. James Arreak: As I said before, Nunavut comprises three regions, so it would be difficult to try to sell a regional approach. That's my first response.

I don't know if Mr. Fleming has anything else to add.

Mr. Brian Fleming: No. Keep going.

Mr. James Arreak: When you have two seats, from that point of view I think it would be difficult. I'd be curious about the point Mr. Cullen raised about breaking the barriers of representation that worked for the Maori people. I'm not sure if he's here to confirm that information, but I'd be curious about how that system works, if it's going to be imposed in our jurisdiction.

Mr. John Aldag: It could be two members for the territory. I think Iqaluit is the main centre, so you could end up with both members coming from this community. Would that be an issue to the other two regions? We'd need to be aware of that.

Notwithstanding the concerns Mr. Reid has put out there, I also want to confirm that if in the ideal world we had two members for Nunavut based on the huge geography, then the second piece of it would also be looking at those three members for specifically the Inuit population, not just for Nunavut but across the Inuit population in Canada.

Perfect. I just wanted to clarify that.

There is another piece of clarification. Mr. Arreak, in your comments, you talked about the referendum question. I was trying to get what you had said, and I actually didn't get it, so could you give me your thoughts again, either you or Mr. Merritt? Take me through what the recommendation was on the referendum question.

Mr. John Merritt: Do you mean a referendum in a general sense, not the referendum that took place in the early—

Mr. John Aldag: Yes, in the general sense, moving forward.

Mr. John Merritt: As I understand it, what Mr. Arreak said is that NTI is mindful that a referendum can be a very divisive exercise in any democratic circumstances, and in Canada we've seen some fairly unhappy referendum exercises. I think Mr. Arreak recited some of the examples. The Charlottetown Accord was a disappointment. It didn't contribute to Canadian unity. It actually left a lot of bad feeling behind. There were issues around conscription and the referendum about that. Perhaps that was a necessary way of dealing with that issue at the time when Mackenzie King was prime minister, but there was certainly a legacy of bad feeling about that.

We've seen in recent times, like everyone else, the vote in Britain on Brexit. These aren't necessarily nation-building exercises. They might start out with everybody's high intentions, but the other side of it, I guess, as Mr. Arreak emphasized, is that at NTI we have a high respect for Parliament's role in making important national decisions, and if each party adopted a very clear alternative before the next election, then Canadians would have a chance to make a decision as to whether they think that party's proposal should be part of putting that party into power.

Mr. John Aldag: That's the piece I missed. I thought that's what it was, but I just wanted to confirm it.

Just before I run out of time, Mr. Fleming, you took a very strong position on mandatory voting. Simply put, I heard there was no support at this time. Could you give us your thoughts on why you've taken that position?

Mr. Brian Fleming: It could be a great way to get greater voter turnout: you have to vote if you're 18 or 16 or whatever the age is. You have to vote. However, I just think there are too many problems inherent in dealing with, for example, "I didn't have a babysitter, so I couldn't come in to vote."

If it's going to be mandatory, I think you need very clear guidelines in terms of why someone couldn't vote, because as I understand it, there would just be a voters list. If James here didn't vote, we could say we were going to fine him \$200 because he didn't come in to vote, and James says, "Well, I didn't have a babysitter." It's that kind of thing.

• (1445)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a couple of questions.

First, Mr. Arreak, in your opening remarks you were talking about how first past the post might favour candidates with more extreme positions, and I was curious about your thoughts in terms of that, related to more proportional systems. That's often one of the criticisms of proportional systems: they tend to favour putting in place parties that have extreme viewpoints. We've seen it in Europe with neo-Nazi types of parties getting seats. There was an article recently about the upcoming Iceland elections and how the Pirate Party might even become the governing party as a result of having those single-issue candidates. In some countries you might see the taxi drivers party, for example, getting seats.

I think that has been one of the arguments against those types of systems, so I'd like to hear your thoughts on that. Of course, even those parties with just a few seats can end up having a lot of power in a government, in terms of coalitions that are created and things like that.

I know you made that comment in relation to first past the post. I was curious what your thoughts were in relation to proportional systems, with more extreme parties getting in. Would that be something you'd be concerned about, with that type of system?

Mr. James Arreak: Thank you for the question, Mr. Richards. Yes, absolutely. I think the mood tends to kind of go up the middle on a lot of the issues.

We are survivalists and tend to make decisions based on the chances of surviving. Does it require extreme positions? Sometimes it requires extreme positions if it's helpful and if it's going to give us the chance to survive, but when it comes to unhelpful groups that come to complain or to misrepresent who we are, that would be a very serious misrepresentation. From that point of view, yes, I think I would be concerned about something that is presented that would skew people away from what would help the public versus what something that just represents a very small extreme group that suddenly becomes very popular and powerful, which is dangerous.

That would be my response.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Could I ask you as well about...? I don't think you had a chance to respond, as I don't remember hearing your response.

Mr. Fleming, you had your organization's perspective on mandatory voting and online voting, but I don't think Mr. Arreak or Mr. Merritt have had a chance to give comment on behalf of their organizations on online voting or mandatory voting. Do you have any comments there?

Mr. John Merritt: Our organization hasn't given that issue a great deal of attention, so I think anything we say here wouldn't be based on any conversations sufficient to give assurance, except as a completely impromptu remark. I guess it's one of those things we'll take away from this presentation to think about.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We'll go now to Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'd like to thank all three witnesses for being here today. It is my first time in Iqaluit, and I'm excited to be here. Mr. Tootoo, it's a pleasure to be in your riding. I hope it's not my last visit, and I'd like to extend my condolences for the loss of your mayor, Mr. Pearson.

Talking about the vast size of Nunavut, Mr. Arreak, you mentioned the population is spread over 22 communities. When I look at the size of Nunavut and I look at my cute little riding of Longueuil—Charles-Lemoyne on the south shore of Montreal, with 39 square kilometres, I think you could probably fit that in your backyard right here.

I'd like to know some of the challenges that you face in terms of voter participation. You talked a little about Internet connectivity, or lack thereof, but what are some of the other challenges? I'm looking at some of the demographics for Nunavut, where you have a very young population. I'm looking at the participation rates in your federal election. The last election was a nice big boom of 62.54% participation, but previous elections were not that high. In fact, you have two elections over the last 12 years that had less than 50% participation.

If you could go through some of the other challenges that you face to get over the barriers for participation, that would be helpful for us, because we have heard different feedback from different communities.

• (1450)

Mr. James Arreak: We haven't spoken of the disconnect between the voters and the government. For example, how relevant is this to me on a daily basis? The majority of the Nunavut population is under the age of 25. I like the fact that you have noticed this, because we are a very young population, a very young territory, with vast challenges.

Programs like the Nunavut Sivuniksavut, or NS, have helped prepare some of our young people to become more acquainted with who they are and what the Nunavut agreement says. It's like the French system for the in-between years. I can't remember what they call it, but the young people who have graduated from that program know how to become a productive part of society and how you can contribute.

When consultations come to your community, the people aren't engaged, because the methodology of the consultation process is absolutely foreign. We try to help government say this is how you engage communities. Sometimes the communities are over-consulted, and consultation fatigue is going on in the people. It's a "What's another election day?" kind of thing.

There are those kinds of challenges, I think, along with what Brian mentioned on the lack of infrastructure.

I don't know if there's anything else John or Brian wants to add to your question.

Mr. Brian Fleming: James mentioned disconnect. Although we have a lot of young people in Nunavut, there's a disconnect there, certainly with TV. I'm pretty sure most homes across Nunavut still have one or two elders in them, and in that case they would probably be listening to Inuktitut. That would be my bet.

The young people are probably not aware of all the issues going on when we go to the polls. Some years it turns out really well, especially if a big trump card's at issue. Other years it's a mishmash of a whole lot of different things; no one can get their head around it, and there's probably a low turnout.

You would have to check the weather on those low-turnout days, because if you had an election and a whiteout happened in seven of those communities, very few people would get to the polling station. The town would be closed. Go vote at your own risk. You need to check the weather on those dates, because I'm sure that could be a major factor.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Boulерice, please.

[Translation]

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

First of all, gentlemen, thank you very much for being here with us this afternoon.

Like my colleagues, I want to extend my condolences for the loss of your former mayor, who was greatly appreciated from what we hear.

This is my first visit to Nunavut and Iqaluit. I hope it will not be my last. I find this vast and magnificent territory I am seeing for the first time very impressive.

The committee is coming to the end of its travels and its consultations. We have been just about everywhere in Canada. Our mandate is to try to find a better voting system for the next federal elections. In the last one, 18 million people voted. Of that number, nine million votes went to elect 338 members, but the other nine million votes were cast for nothing, in fact, since they were not reflected in Parliament.

As you were saying earlier, Mr. Arreak, one candidate may be up against three or four others. He can thus win with only 30% or 35% of the vote. In such a case, he or she was not elected by the majority of his fellow citizens in the riding, regardless of its size, even if it is a very large one like this one.

Which leads me to the following question. You have been a member of the territorial Parliament. I would like to know what lessons you would like to share from that experience that might guide us in our work and research. A little earlier you said that the federal government functions in a manner that is not at all in keeping with the values of the population of Nunavut. I would like you to explain that further.

• (1455)

[English]

Mr. James Arreak: *Qujannamiik.* Thank you. *Merci.*

To respond to Mr. Boulерice, I am not an elected member. I ran once, but I lost.

I share your concern. How do we get people to come out to vote? That has been our organization's biggest question as well. Sometimes that falls on the candidates themselves: whether they are popular, whether they can speak eloquently and connect with the people. That seems to be correlated with the number of people who go out to vote. That's a real connection there.

Territorially, sometimes trying to vote from a party-line perspective seems to be a bit of a new thing for Inuit: "Okay, I like these guys, so I'll go with these guys and vote for the party line. They seem popular." Sometimes people go that way. Sometimes people just say, "Oh, they're for sure", and there are very few of those.

We are in this together in trying to get people to go out and vote. Their votes do count. It's a voice being expressed, and that's people practising their freedom.

How much money did we spend last year? For 18 million voters, it was probably billions of dollars. That's probably a \$2-billion question for us as well.

Maybe Hunter has things to contribute about his experience with the process. I don't know if my colleagues have anything to add.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Thank you very much, Mr. Arreak.

We have been wondering for some time about how to encourage voting and participation in the electoral process. You told us that it could be difficult to vote sometimes because of the weather and the distances involved. In other meetings, people have suggested that the vote take place on a holiday.

What do you think?

[English]

Mr. James Arreak: Not a bad idea, I think.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. James T. Arreak: People would have a chance to say, “Hey, it's election day. I'm free to go vote.” As employers, we give our staff time to go vote on that day, so I don't know how much of a contribution that would make.

• (1500)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Again, thank you to our guests today. It has been a fascinating panel, and we certainly appreciate your insight.

I want to follow up with all our panellists on what Mr. Aldag was talking about. If I understood correctly, you are not necessarily in favour of a referendum, for a number of reasons, and that's certainly a valid opinion. I don't want to read too much into your comments. I do think you would agree that there needs to be a sense of legitimacy to the change in process. That was your recommendation, that there should be a clear platform commitment to some form of electoral reform. I know from my town hall meetings that it is challenging for Canadians to provide input when they don't know exactly which proposal is being made.

Am I reading too much into this? Is that the sense you are getting from the people of Nunavut, that there should be some kind of clear platform commitment, and then a change made after the 2019 election?

Perhaps I'll throw it out to Mr. Fleming as well. You made the comment that in discussing this issue with your 25 mayors, there wasn't a clear sense of specifically where electoral reform should go. If I get the sense correctly, you are probably thinking there should be some kind of clear platform before further discussion is undertaken.

Mr. Brian Fleming: One example would be here in Nunavut, where we just had a referendum on whether municipalities should be allowed to sell land. It was overwhelmingly “no”, so we're just going to stay with the system.

On some of these referendum questions, the more clearly laid out the question that we've voting on the better, because if it gets long-winded, it's pretty tough for people to wrap their heads around.

I'll add to Alexandre's question about how to get voters out. I don't think it's necessarily the task of politicians, but at least up

north, if you can get into the schools and talk to people about why it's important to vote, I think it can go a long way, because there is quite a disconnect up here. Someone living in Grise Fiord is wondering “Why do I need to vote? What's Ottawa going to do for me? It's a long way away.” However, if more school awareness programs and things like that can be done, I think they will help to educate people about voting, especially because we have so many youths here in Nunavut.

Mr. John Merritt: Thank you, sir.

I think you're interpreting NTI's outlook correctly. I think there's a perception at NTI that the public expectation in Canada is that we would not have the current House of Commons reform an electoral system on its own without the Canadian public having some further say on the matter. That seems to be a widespread opinion in Canada, and it's probably better to go with that as the current Parliament, rather than to resist it or try to stare it down. If there's a need for some further democratic sign-off on this issue, then the choices are obviously a direct referendum-style vote or a federal election.

NTI has had good experiences with Parliament in terms of the ability of Parliament to respond to Inuit agenda on a number of things. The Nunavut Act itself, the creation of the territory, came about through an act of Parliament; there wasn't a national vote on creating a new territory in Canada. We've had two quite complex pieces of legislation adopted by Parliament to implement the Nunavut agreement, one on planning and project assessments, which essentially replaces the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency in Nunavut, and one on Nunavut waters and surface rights.

Since probably the late 1970s, NTI has appeared at parliamentary committees at least two or three dozen times, and that experience has generally been positive. I suspect this might be good news for people doing your work. I think there's a healthy respect for the ability of Parliament to deal with complex issues in a way that's fair and representative. We're here today, of course, as a vote of confidence in Parliament's ability to do that. We don't see the referendum as necessarily an ideal vehicle.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's the turn of Mr. DeCoursey, please.

• (1505)

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

Thank you to all three presenters.

My colleague Ms. Sahota asked earlier on about the distinction between the three territories, and therefore the importance of having distinct representation in the three territories.

Mr. Reid talked about some testimony we heard in Whitehorse. One of our witnesses referred to the north being the north, but there was some debate on whether it would be acceptable to have representatives elected through a collective proportional vote share across the north if proportionality is introduced. There has even been talk of that vote share extending south into some of the northern provincial boundaries.

Certainly constitutional questions come into play, but would it be palatable at all if somebody were elected based on a vote share that crossed territorial boundaries? I know you've mentioned it a little and shared some of your concerns with an MMP model, but can you offer a definitive point of view on that question?

Mr. John Merritt: Before Mr. Arreak responds, I would note that there are Inuit living in northern Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador as well. In relation to that question, it's important to remember that any system like that might have to be open to an Inuit vote that would include Inuit living in territories and provinces, not just in the territories.

Mr. James Arreak: As well, I think it would be difficult to implement, because there are barriers you don't know of that exist between the jurisdictions. For example, in Nunavut, even though we're a close and similar culture, there are some gaps there that I think you should be aware of as a committee responsible for this.

Those kinds of challenges do exist, if there were that kind of model, even though we just said that.... We do exercise it at the ITK level, but at times it's pretty challenging when there are different positions and parties in Nunavut.

Mr. Brian Fleming: Mr. Chair, if I understood the question correctly, we'd be voting for two or three more MPs on a northern basis, regardless of the territory?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: In a theoretical MMP model, if you maintain the one constituency MP and then there was a proportional vote share that extended across the territories to elect however many more MPs, would that be acceptable? The vote share of Yukoners, people from the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut would all count in a proportional election.

Mr. Brian Fleming: I think it would be very difficult to do too. I'd be concerned about the representation. For example, in the Northwest Territories, a well-known candidate from Yellowknife could probably take the entire.... If they were to win Yellowknife, they'd probably take the proportional vote there. I'd be concerned on that basis alone.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: This is my last question, Mr. Arreak.

You talked about the alternative vote ballot, the ranked ballot, as perhaps an option in a large single-member district. Let's say that there are no additional seats proposed for the north based on the concept of representation by population. Would you propose to this committee that for large ridings like Nunavut, a ranked ballot be introduced? Are there any challenges you see in people comprehending a ranking system? We did have some discussion about that in the Northwest Territories, where the idea of ranking people one, two, three, four, five was not a very comprehensible idea to some people in the population.

Mr. James Arreak: I think a ranked ballot system, as proposed, is difficult to facilitate. It would require quite a process to support it and for the public to understand it intuitively. There are some logistical challenges with a ranked ballot process. Those would be considerations, I guess.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Did I understand you correctly that on the idea of building some level of consensus within the large geographic area, there's value in exploring the idea of a ranked ballot?

• (1510)

Mr. James Arreak: Yes.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thanks very much.

Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

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

That ends this segment of our meeting day. That was a great discussion.

Thank you again, Mr. Arreak, Mr. Fleming, and Mr. Merritt.

We'll break for about five minutes, and then we'll come back with our second panel.

Thank you.

• (1510)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (1520)

The Chair: We'll open this second segment of our meeting.

We have a number of witnesses on our panel, including Senator Patterson. It's nice to have you here today. Our condolences for the passing of, I believe, your first mayor of Iqaluit, who was obviously well loved and will be missed.

In addition to Senator Patterson, we have Mr. Terry Forth, as an individual; Mr. Kuthula Matshazi, a councillor for the Town of Iqaluit; and Mr. Brad Chambers, who is appearing as an individual.

Each witness will get about 10 minutes. We'll start with Senator Patterson because I know you have some time constraints, Senator.

Go ahead, please.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson (Senator): *Qujannamiik.* Thank you, Mr. Chair, for inviting me to appear before you today.

I would like to welcome all honourable members of Parliament here and thank you very much for this opportunity to discuss my thoughts on electoral reform as they relate to my home jurisdiction of Nunavut and here in my home community of Iqaluit.

I understand that today marks the final day of committee hearings outside of Ottawa. I want to strongly commend you for taking the time to visit every province and territory in the country. I'm sure it has not been easy.

I have two messages for you today.

First, we have a long-established tradition of dealing with important public policy questions in the Northwest Territories and Yukon, which I respectfully ask you to consider in formulating your recommendations to the government.

Second, please let's not rush this important process. It's especially important to us northerners to have an opportunity to weigh in on a question with significant national importance, such as this one.

As you know, Nunavut was officially separated from its sister territory, the NWT, on April 1, 1999. The NWT and Nunavut, in their relatively short time as fully elected governments responsible to their people, have forged strong traditions that the rest of us could well emulate, including a tradition of respectful relationships with the aboriginal peoples who are the strong majority in both territories.

Another of our strong traditions is the so-called consensus system of government, which has served us well in making major progress on challenging issues such as the resolution of complex and comprehensive land claims and significant progress in what we call “constitutional development”, reflected in the steady acquisition of province-like responsibilities from Ottawa in areas such as health, public utilities, and management and a revenue share of lands and resources in the NWT in 2014, a process that is being negotiated in Nunavut as we speak.

We've managed to do all that without partisan politics in the NWT and Nunavut. It is a great system in which I proudly served for 16 years, and a system I'm most comfortable with and welcome in the Senate of Canada, now moving towards more independence and less partisanship.

What I want to emphasize today, honourable members, is that we know how to address big public policy questions successfully. We agreed to divide the Northwest Territories to create a new public government in Nunavut with a strong Inuit majority, alongside the largest and most ambitious land claims settlement in history; to establish a new regulatory regime—because we don't use the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act here in Nunavut—and to determine a boundary for division. All that was done without strife, and certainly without bloodshed or bitterness.

We did so by taking our time, as it was a process of more than 20 years. We did so by consulting all citizens at every major step of the way, and this is my message to you today, respectfully.

Dear parliamentary colleagues, I ask you to respect that the NWT and Nunavut have a very strong tradition of consulting the people on major public policy decisions and have established from the first days of elected government a long-standing and well-established system of public voting—we call them plebiscites—to ensure that the general electorate is consulted on major public policy decisions such as the one you're wrestling with, reform of the electoral system.

In Nunavut, the Plebiscites Act regulates direct votes on community and Nunavut-wide questions. This fundamental tool for legislators to secure a mandate for major changes in public policy was established in the NWT when major electoral and constitutional reforms were contemplated by the elected legislators of the day.

The Plebiscites Act was established in 1974 and became a crucial vehicle to assure the federal government that the people of the NWT were supportive of major political changes. I want to give you some examples of the important questions on which the people of Nunavut were given a voice.

● (1525)

In 1982, when Nunavut was part of the NWT, there was a very important vote on whether or not the Northwest Territories should be divided into two territories. The outcome of this vote, in which

56.5% of residents of three years' standing in the NWT voted “yes”, was absolutely critical in paving the way for the creation of Nunavut.

Then in 1995 there was a vote on which community should become the capital of Nunavut. The choices were Rankin Inlet or Iqaluit, and 60% voted for Iqaluit as the capital, compared to 40% who voted for Rankin Inlet.

Please note that we then considered what I thought was an exciting and beneficial change to our voting system in territorial elections. It was a very exciting proposal that would have seen one man and one woman guaranteed to be elected in each territorial riding. We held a plebiscite to determine the wishes of the general electorate. The question in that vote was, “Should the first Nunavut Legislative Assembly have equal numbers of men and women MLAs, with one man and one woman elected to represent each electoral district?” The result, which sadly was very disappointing to me, was that 57% voted against the change.

People must have a voice and a vote if we are to change our way of electing MPs. However, for that vote to truly be representative of the will of the Canadian people, I strongly believe that it's important to ensure that every Canadian has the opportunity to make a truly informed decision.

I have a Senate Facebook page. Facebook is ubiquitous in the north, even though we have very slow Internet. Some of my posts have had a reach of over 4,000 all the way to 19,000 people. My most popular post to date has had 933 interactions, which include likes, shares, and comments.

In September I launched an Internet survey asking respondents to identify how much they understood about the options available for electoral reform. I've received only two responses to date. This, to me, is an indication that more engagement and a better, deeper understanding of alternative systems are needed.

In preparing for today, I reviewed your committee's mandate and noted in particular the welcome emphasis on principles of engagement and legitimacy connected with your study of alternative voting systems. I also noted that the standing order establishing the committee directed the committee to study and advise on additional methods for obtaining the views of Canadians.

Today I've described a decades-long tradition of a territorial government seeking the views of their electorate on proposals for significant policy change through what we call plebiscites. I do hope this history of our experience dealing with major changes in a non-partisan system of government, time-tested over decades in our albeit short history of representative elected government, is informative. I also hope that your committee will consider this method of engaging northerners and obtaining their views. This is how we make important decisions on matters of public policy in the north. This is how we've engaged our aboriginal majorities and established successful partnerships to implement modern treaties, enshrining aboriginal rights alongside public government. This is how we persuaded the federal government to draw new boundaries in the north and on one-third of the map of Canada, and to create a new contiguous territory of Nunavut alongside a modern treaty.

I respectfully recommend that a public vote is similarly what will be required to give legitimacy to any plans for electoral reform in Canada.

Thank you very much for this opportunity.

● (1530)

The Chair: Thank you, Senator, for that interesting perspective. It adds a lot to our discussion.

We'll go now to Councillor Matshazi for 10 minutes.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi (Councillor, Town of Iqaluit): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I don't think I'll use up all my 10 minutes.

The Chair: Pardon me, sir?

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I'm saying that I don't think I'll use all my 10 minutes, but—

The Chair: That's fine. Take whatever you need, up to 10 minutes.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I will try to address the key issues.

Before I begin my presentation, I would like to offer my condolences to the family of Mayor Bryan Pearson.

Second, I'm pleased that the government has taken this initiative to review the electoral system. It's an interesting opportunity. I heard about electoral reform when I first came to Canada, and it has been an ongoing public discussion; however, there has been little debate by senators and members of the House of Commons. I'm presenting here today as a city councillor of Iqaluit.

My presentation is going to be short, because Senator Patterson has already given a very comprehensive and extensive history of the electoral reform landscape in Nunavut. I couldn't have done it any better, because he has been here for so long that he has a better grasp of the transition of the northern territories than I have, so thank you so much.

While Canada is a strong and respected democracy, we inherited the first-past-the-post system. The government believes that it is time to create a new system that is broad and representative of voters' views. Of the 34 member countries of the OECD, Canada is one of only three that continue to use the first-past-the-post system to elect legislators. It's time to remind all Canadians that they are in charge.

We need to modernize our voting system so that it provides all of us with an opportunity to participate more fully in shaping our country.

In the first-past-the-post system, the candidate with the largest number of votes wins, even if that candidate has less than the majority of the votes cast.

While proponents of the first-past-the-post system argue that the system is simple for voters and most likely to produce governments with a stable majority, others have noticed that the first-past-the-post system routinely forms governments without majority populace support, and at times with less support but more seats than the second-place party.

The first-past-the-post system incentivizes strategic voting, which distorts voter intention, and sadly, minority rule and strategic voting can weaken the perceived legitimacy of elected representatives and governments.

While there is no such thing as a perfect electoral system, as a country we can do better. We deserve broad representative politics that lead to elections that inspire Canadians to vote. That does need to be emphasized, based on the number of people who usually go out to vote.

We need stable governments that respond to the needs of Canadians, and a representation that reflects our diversity and political views.

The five principles that guide the parliamentary committee study are very noble: looking at the effectiveness and legitimacy of the voting system, encouraging engagement and participation in the democratic process, supporting accessibility and inclusiveness for all eligible voters, building integrity into the system, and taking into consideration the accountability of local representation.

Senator Patterson has touched on all of these issues, and I will just emphasize the issue of local representation.

● (1535)

As a territory, we are huge, and we feel we might be better represented if we adopt a different voting system, one that will provide us with not only one member of Parliament but maybe a couple more, and one that is not based on the first-past-the-post system, but something that will be more representative of the voting electorate.

Finally, one issue I want to stress is the issue of effectiveness and legitimacy. From a democratic participation principle, I think it is very important that the system we have should have legitimacy so that people can have faith that when they go to vote, their vote will count, and that the system they are voting in will help them have a reflection in the division of power so that it's not just one person with a slim majority taking all the power, the winner-take-all situation. If we can build some form of equity into the system, I think we might see a lot of people participating in the system.

Thank you very much.

● (1540)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go now to Mr. Forth, please, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Terry Forth (As an Individual): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, everyone. It's my privilege, and it's a great privilege, to have the opportunity to be here this afternoon and to address this committee on some very important matters. I believe that electoral reform is a very important question, central to our form of democracy in Canada.

I promise to keep my comments brief, but first I'd like to point out that many of us here in Nunavut have a day job that sometimes complicates the ability for us to speak independently on occasions such as this. Nevertheless, I want to make it clear to the committee that I'm here today as a private citizen. I'm not in any way representing the organization I work with on a daily basis, or any other organization of which I'm an active member. The views I may express here today are mine alone.

Second, I'd like to touch briefly on my own history. I grew up and was educated in southern Canada, in the very large cities, even then, of Toronto and Montreal. My first employment following my university graduation was in the Lakeshore-West Island area, where I also lived for most of the eight years that I was living in Montreal before I came to the Arctic.

For half of my adult life, I have lived and worked in the north, initially in the Northwest Territories and for the past 17 years, since the beginning of Nunavut. For both my wife Mehrun and me, our working and living lives in the north stretch back over an almost 49-year time span. My work experience and fields of interest have included adult education, housing education, human resource development, and economic development. My wife Mehrun was a registered nurse and midwife.

I've worked closely with Inuit during all of that period, and also with other indigenous people, in all parts of the three territories.

I want to confirm Senator Patterson's observation on how major decisions have been made in the north and about how parliamentary democracy should work, at least in recent decades. The decision not to divide the Northwest Territories, as the senator has pointed out, into two territories, the Mackenzie and Nunassiat, as it was called then, as proposed in legislation first introduced into the House in 1963, ultimately emanated from the Carrothers commission report in 1966. I'm sorry to be a little pedantic about history, but I think it's important that the idea of dividing the Northwest Territories was not new. It originally stretched back to the early sixties.

Second, the Carrothers commission, which was formed right after the legislation died on the order paper, after two years recommended not to divide the territory. I think that decision may in fact have been the last time that important and crucial changes were contemplated in any of our three northern territories without a broad public consultation process that culminated in some sort of referendum or plebiscite.

As Senator Patterson has pointed out, in Nunavut we actually have a Plebiscites Act for direct votes on community or Nunavut-wide questions, and I'll come back to this in a minute. I think it's also important, though, to emphasize that a critical aspect of the Inuit land claims process in Nunavut was the decision to work towards a parliamentary form of public government rather than Inuit self-rule.

● (1545)

I believe that electoral reform falls into the category of an important and serious issue that calls out for an opportunity to hear the voices of all the people, particularly the citizens of Nunavut, who have come to the party a bit late. I also understand and agree that the issues at play are complex and difficult to understand. It's not easy to explain the various options under consideration. Nevertheless, and with all due respect, I do not believe that this is reason enough to deny the people an opportunity to have a say and to then leave the matter solely to parliamentarians for a decision.

Furthermore, I believe that Parliament has an obligation to ensure that appropriate steps are taken by way of public information and education to ensure that the voters of Canada all understand the electoral options that are being considered. In my opinion, again with all due respect, this should involve more than the use of websites and travelling parliamentary committee hearings. I believe there's a strong expectation here in Canada's newest jurisdiction that something as important as changing the rules governing how federal elections will run would require a referendum and an opportunity for all citizens to vote for the process they would most favour.

If the outcome of the consultations that you have embarked on is to go ahead anyway, with just a vote in Parliament, then I agree with the Mr. Cullen's suggestion that this should, in effect, become a temporary or interim measure, to be followed at some early point down the road by further consideration, after people have had a chance to witness and experience first-hand the impact of whatever changes are brought about. This would then provide an opportunity to review and reconsider, making further modifications to electoral reform with public inputs and preferably a public vote.

It's also important to reflect on the history of electoral evolution in Canada's north. Inuit, who continue to make up the vast majority of our population here in Nunavut and in other parts of the most northerly areas of the Northwest Territories, were only enfranchised in 1948. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that the first time Inuit voters living in what is now Nunavut had an opportunity to vote in a federal election was perhaps 1953, but from my brief examination of the records, it appears that it was likely many years later that Inuit first had an actual opportunity to vote, and that was simply logistics.

As a quick aside, when I filed my first income tax return, having moved north, it was as a foreigner, as a non-resident of Canada. It was the same income tax form that was completed for citizens living abroad, so the north was sort of barely part of this country. It means that Inuit have really only taken an active role in our federal electoral process for perhaps 60 years. That is not a very long time. I know that potential members of Parliament were campaigning in parts of what is now Nunavut in the early sixties.

● (1550)

I had an opportunity in 1968 to see one of the candidates campaigning in Chesterfield Inlet. His campaign methods were somewhat interesting, as he distributed oranges at the meetings he held in the community. Of course, this was so that potential voters would recall his last name when they were voting, which was Bud Orange.

Mr. Chairperson, I think the committee needs to look at Nunavut as an example of how referendums or plebiscites on important matters of public interest can actually work. There have been several examples, as Senator Patterson has clearly indicated: the fusion of the NWT, the location of our capital, and gender equity in our legislative assembly. Other territory-wide decisions concerning land title and the sale of beer, wine, and spirits have also been conducted. Local decisions concerning prohibition of alcohol are also undertaken in communities from time to time.

From a personal point of view, I believe that a better initial option for Canada would be one of the two majority systems: alternative vote, as is the case in Australia, or a runoff, two-round system, such as they have in France.

I believe that many voters here in Nunavut may already think we have a majority voting system in place now, but of course that's not true, and in fact our current member of Parliament, with all due respect, did not win a majority of the votes in the last election, but just over 47% of all votes cast. One of the two majority systems I have just cited might have produced a different result here in Nunavut, and of course the same might have applied in other parts of Canada as well. We can only speculate.

I promised to keep my comments brief, so I will end my presentation here, Mr. Chairperson, but will be happy to respond to any questions the committee members might have during the question period.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Chambers, please, for 10 minutes.

Mr. Brad Chambers (As an Individual): Thank you.

Thank you for coming to Iqaluit. Thank you for having me on this panel. It's an honour to be here.

I submitted a brief on electoral reform and I will speak quickly about what I propose. I will, for the most part, skip over the analysis of the various options that are typically discussed, except to say the obvious, which is that there are trade-offs and drawbacks to all of them, and you have the challenging task of not only picking one proposal out of the noise, but then trying to rally everyone to it.

I'd like to start by drawing attention to geography. It is easy for urban Canadians, when sitting around dreaming of electoral reform, to map the German system or the Irish system or whatever system onto Canada, but one defining characteristic of Canada is its widely dispersed population. Nunavut is, of course, the most dramatic example, but it is not just true for Nunavut or even just for the territories. Our expansiveness, combined with a long legacy of first-past-the-post elections, means localness is more important here than perhaps anywhere in the world. Even expanding ridings by 50%, as mixed member proportional systems might, hurts local representation in many parts of Canada. This may not be nearly as true in urban areas, which often have less distinct riding boundaries and where an average urban street can separate two ridings.

Alienation is an easy problem to have in Canada, and local representation, as local as possible, is key for voters to feel they can continue to be connected to government during elections and

between them. Many Canadians in small towns or even small cities, and especially those in rural and remote areas, will feel a great loss if they are subsumed into larger ridings. This could hurt voter engagement of marginal groups; it's detrimental to the inclusion of aboriginal groups, farmers, and any other interest that struggles to be heard in a riding of 100,000 or more people, and it could be lost entirely in a larger riding. The solution is to have a hybrid system, which is a system with some single-seat ridings and some multi-seat ridings. This solution has also been proposed by a few others, as I'm sure you know.

I don't propose this as a one-issue solution. I think there are benefits to a hybrid system other than just balancing localness and proportionality, but while everyone seems to want to keep local representation, they propose larger ridings, and that concerns me. The problem here, or let's call it an opportunity, is that there is some difficulty in determining which ridings should remain single-seat ridings and which ridings should be merged. I don't think it's as simple as looking at physical size. There may be some urban ridings of a distinct nature that want to maintain their distinctiveness. There may be some rural or remote ridings that value the ability to elect multiple members over maintaining the most local riding they can, so I propose this decision to be the riding's choice—not just once, but on an ongoing basis.

What's at stake when deciding between a single-member riding and larger multi-member ridings are two important decisions. The first decision involves localness and proportionality. These are the two electoral reform features talked about the most. There is no way to maximize localness and proportionality at the riding level. To gain proportionality, there are some costs to localness.

The second decision, although much less discussed, is how constituents are represented, but I believe it is important in practice. There's no way to give constituents competition and choice among multiple MPs, as in multi-member ridings, while also keeping the strength of representation in small single-member ridings with an MP with a duty to serve all constituents. The larger ridings can only weaken an MP's feel for the riding, which would be at least 50% bigger than now, and it make it harder for constituents to identify with their MP.

These are very important factors that affect people's connection to their democracy, and what happens when you make that decision for them? Your five principles for electoral reform apply to the process as well as the outcome. Taking these important decisions away from voters and putting them up front in this process in electoral reform invites many people to be against whatever is proposed. Keeping this in the hands of the electorate means people aren't pulled in as many directions and are more likely to accept this change.

The mechanism I propose for this is a yes-or-no question at election time, asking voters if they want to stay as they are or change. In the first election, upon implementation, it would be a question of staying as a single-member riding or joining a multi-seat district. In the future, they could vote on switching back or on switching from one district to another. Leading up to the election, there would be a petition process to see what options should be put to voters. In most parts of the country, the primary merger option would be fairly obvious.

• (1555)

This is the short version of what I propose. This system has some unique advantages.

First, while mixed systems are not terrible, they are a blunt tool. Why impose a compromise system on the whole country when we can have location-specific solutions?

Second, it's the most democratic, because voters decide. It has a small initial step that leaves some future decision-making in the hands of voters, making it the most sellable to the public. Change must be incremental for the electorate to support the changed initiative. The best proposal in the world accomplishes nothing if it's voted down.

It's one of the few proposals that can possibly be initiated for the next election, since there are no changes to electoral boundaries. It just needs time for a petition process in each riding to have a merger option to vote on at election time.

It would improve proportionality on a national level, while allowing ridings to stay the same size as they are now, where and when that is considered important by those constituents. It is as proportional as people want it to be, and it's as local as people want it to be.

While it has a unique procedural element to it, what I propose will involve tried and true political systems in the actual election itself. Federal elections are not the place for experimenting with brand new election systems.

Our riding choice model is moderate, easy to sell to the electorate, balances localness and proportionality, and is strong on effectiveness, on legitimacy and voter engagement, and above all excels at being democratic, which is what this is all about.

Qujannamik. Thank you.

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

We'll go now to the round of questioning. Each member of the committee will have five minutes to engage with the witnesses.

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

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you.

I'd like to start by thanking all of the witnesses. Your presentations were very informative.

I'll start off with Mr. Chambers, since you ended off with giving me a lot to think about in your proposal.

I think when you were summarizing all the different options we have to weigh and the different trade-offs we'd make with moving to

different systems, you were bang on with the complexity of the issue, because there's always something we have to trade in order to gain something else. That is the position we're in, and we're trying to figure out what's most important to gain and what's the least of our priorities so we can trade it off.

There is one issue I see with putting the question of whether they want to merge or not merge to the people at every election. You said that in some areas the boundaries or regions you would merge together to have a multi-member district would be quite obvious. What if one current riding of that multi-member region votes to stay as a single-member region, but the other three or four vote to merge? What happens then? The intent of the majority of the people there is that they would like to merge, but then one riding that is the obvious choice to fit into that merger is saying they want to stay as a single member. What would you do in that situation?

• (1600)

Mr. Brad Chambers: That riding would stay as a single-seat riding. It could be a Switzerland in the middle of a multi-member riding around it. I don't see any particular problems with that.

The complication is each riding has to know what's on the table. There does have to be some coordination. If riding A wants to merge with riding B, and riding B is more interested in merging with riding C, there does need to be some coordination there. However, as I said, in most parts of Canada there are obvious urban blocks or geographic delineations that would lead to obvious grouping, and that's what the petition process would have to figure out.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Forth mentioned that he has a large Facebook following, and even when.... Was that the senator? Yes. Sorry, Senator.

You have a large Facebook following, and even when you put this question to people, there were only a couple of responses. How do you feel about Mr. Chambers' proposal? I think one of the good things about our system currently is that it is simple to understand. Whether that's lower on the totem pole, and you can trade that off....

It's not that big of a deal, perhaps, but ballot choices would be different in a single-member riding from those in a multi-member. Do you think not knowing in every election period whether you're going to be a single-member riding or how you're going to be voting going into a multi-member riding or whatever creates a lot of complexity for the average voter? You've been in politics for a long time. I feel you would probably have a good opinion on what the voter thinks.

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

With all respect to Mr. Chambers, I think what he proposes is too complex. I gave some examples of the very crystal clear question that we created in reference to the very important subject of choosing a capital and dividing the Northwest Territories. With all respect to our population, we're still struggling with achieving success, even with high school graduation. I think it would be very helpful to keep in mind clarity and simplicity in any reforms recommended.

The Chair: Thank you for your testimony. It was very direct and to the point and well backed up.

Go ahead, Ms. Sahota.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Mr. Forth, you mentioned that you'd like to move toward the runoff system that France has or Australia's AV system as models that are appealing to you. Why are those models more appealing than moving toward the system that New Zealand has, which is often cited to this committee as an ideal system to look at?

• (1605)

Mr. Terry Forth: It was in the interests of simplicity. At this stage I wasn't taking exception to the New Zealand model. I was looking at a simple majority approach. I think most voters think that's what we already have, and we don't, obviously.

It wasn't any more complex than that. It wasn't because I was rejecting the New Zealand system out of hand.

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all our witnesses. This has once again been a very interesting panel. I'm grateful to all of you for giving us the benefit of your insight.

I have to mention for the benefit of everybody else on the committee that one of our witnesses today is a part-time constituent of mine. Mr. Forth has a cottage in South Frontenac in part of my riding. There are a lot of grumpy Queen's University professors in South Frontenac who complain about the lousy Internet service. They build their perfect home at the side of a lake under a hill, and then it blocks the Internet signal.

Coming from someone who lives half the year or more up here, I know you won't be complaining about the South Frontenac Internet service.

Mr. Terry Forth: Don't get me started, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid: First of all, thank you. Your presentation was very informative in other respects.

I have to weigh in on a comment you made about the French system versus the alternative vote or instant runoff. I don't think either of these systems is ideal for a Canadian election, but different systems work for different things.

My own party at one time had a French-style system, with two rounds. We've now moved to a preferential ballot with a single winner. Of the two, that is better. The reason the French system is problematic is that in the second round, you have a situation in which the best way to win is by engaging in very aggressive negative campaigning. I happened to be in Europe during the second round of one of the French presidential races, and watching the coverage on TV was most discouraging. It's just an observation.

Mr. Chambers, have you submitted a brief to our analysts outlining how your system would work?

Mr. Brad Chambers: Yes, I have.

Mr. Scott Reid: Okay, we'll make sure to look for that and read through it. I have a feeling we'll profit by a careful reading of it.

I too had questions relating to practical implementation of this idea. I want to start, though, by congratulating you. It's an

unexpected pleasure when we get somebody who has thought through, in a different and innovative way, how to deal with these problems we talked about and has a made-in-Canada solution. I think we sometimes don't realize what it means to try to create solutions that build upon the best of other examples while taking into account Canada's unique problems.

I gather from the way you described the public consultation process that it would not be possible to introduce your proposed system for the 2019 election. Rather, the 2019 election would be the point at which information would be gathered from constituents across the country as to what they'd prefer for their own representation.

Mr. Brad Chambers: The initial election would obviously be different. That first election would be when the riding-by-riding, initial yes-or-no question on merger proposals would be voted on. They would be implemented for the next election.

That's part of the reason I like it, as a matter of fact. It has that small initiation step. It gives people time to work their way into it, and there's no massive change right away. It's incremental, and I think that benefits the public. If you want to maintain integrity and legitimacy, you need time to settle into a new system.

• (1610)

Mr. Scott Reid: I can see how it works in the south, but up here, were you contemplating the possibility of either a merging of the representation of territories in Parliament, which has been suggested by some people, or alternatively, the possibility of creating more MPs for existing territories, which has been suggested by other people, or was it neither of those options?

Mr. Brad Chambers: I don't really know what options are realistic. I had assumed that anything across provincial boundaries would not fly, would not be possible. If it was possible, though, that opens up a lot more opportunities for a place like Nunavut. Assuming that's not true, I'd say our only options for merging would be across to the other territories. That could be the option that's put forward to Nunavut voters, and they'd have to decide if they wanted to merge with NWT or Yukon. Our size makes that seem not particularly attractive, but we seem to be in a position where Nunavut doesn't have a lot of attractive options on the table.

If additional MPs were added to the north, that would obviously open up additional options, or if boundaries with the provinces were not a no-go, then that would open up some opportunities to maybe merge with Labrador. I assume that those things are not options.

Mr. Scott Reid: I agree. I think it's conceivable constitutionally to have the three territories sharing representation in some way, but the Constitution is pretty clear on provincial boundaries being inviolate. Of course, the great irony here is that the Inuit population in Canada is spread across one territory and two provinces, as opposed to there being an Inuit population of any size in Yukon, for example. There is an Inuit population in Labrador, however, and a very large one in northern Quebec.

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

Mr. Scott Reid: Sorry. I want to say thank you very much. It was an innovative proposal, and I appreciate it.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Cullen.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do share that appreciation for innovation.

The provincial jurisdiction thing does come up when, as Mr. Arreak was proposing to us earlier, there is direct representation based on ethnicity. There would potentially be first nations, Métis, and Inuit representation. Do you try to capture people geographically in that representation, or do you capture it in a way that it is presented, as it is in New Zealand? I don't know if we have other examples. I'm sure there are some.

Mr. Matshazi, first of all, congratulations on your election to office.

I'd like to quote your cousin, Beacon Khumalo. I looked you up. He said on the night of your historic election win:

Winning is actually when he delivers (on his promises) so I think this is half the point where I can say he has won.

I like that quote, because on election night we celebrate the winners. We say, "Oh, they have won", yet they're not truly winners, particularly according to your cousin and I think others, until they deliver on the promises that got them elected in the first place. That quotation struck me simply because the formation of this committee is an effort to fulfill a promise. Mr. Trudeau won the last election federally under our current system, but won it with a promise, which is ironic, to do away with that system. As I said, 63% of the people in the House of Commons....

I'll turn this question to Senator Patterson. I'll read you another quote, this one from a former senator. This is weird for a New Democrat, but we're going there.

Senator Len Marchand was talking about first nations' strength in our country in terms of representation. He noted back in 1990 that the current voting system is bad and a barrier because it "fragments aboriginal voting strength to the point where an aboriginal vote is next to meaningless."

What I'm hearing so far today, if I found a theme throughout the testimony, is to please do no harm to the north. Our voices are often singular in terms of Nunavut, but for three vast territories across the north, the theme is "Don't come up with a system that will do us harm", and maybe there can be some enhancements.

Let me put both of the citations I just read those to you, Mr. Patterson. One is about fulfilling a promise, and the second is about the dilution of aboriginal first nations, Métis, and Inuit voices in the current system that we have right now.

•(1615)

Hon. Dennis Glen Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and for that question.

I think you understand perfectly the perspective we have in Nunavut. We're by far the largest jurisdiction in the country—bigger than Ontario, bigger than Quebec—with the smallest population. The Inuit, in turn, are a small minority within Canada, especially small compared with the first nations and Métis. I think you've summarized perfectly a concern that I have, which is to consider the Inuit minority in Nunavut. That's unique in Canada too. We have the highest majority of aboriginal people in Nunavut. Consider the Inuit

minority in Nunavut within Canada as a fragile, small voice, and whatever system is devised, it should do that no harm.

Thank you.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I'll follow up on the questions of legitimacy, because in various forms, both you and Mr. Forth have put forward the idea of legitimizing what we're doing.

I would suggest that Nunavut has had a unique experience with plebiscite, referenda-type questions across a population of 32,000, of which 20-odd thousand would be voting. Canada as a country hasn't had such a spectacular experience with referenda. As some have suggested, it opens up or creates unforeseen divisions. The recent Colombian and U.K. referenda asked one question but got an answer that was entirely unrelated if you look at the exit polls and what people had on their minds. They were popularity contests, unpopularity contests....

Is there another way that we can legitimize this process? Some people have put forward the idea that it's this committee, and then further to that, the House of Commons should come forward with a consensus point of view. It would give Canadians the assurance that one party isn't bringing in a system favourable just to them, which is one of the fears. First, you're getting a bad system, but otherwise you're just cooking the books and making the rules favour partisan interests, outside of referenda. For us as New Democrats, a referendum is not off the table, but we see problems with it. Are there other things that can increase the level of legitimacy?

Perhaps with the little time left, I can have just a couple of quick thoughts from across the table.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: As I mentioned in my presentation, all these different types of voting systems are going to be contentious. It's always going to be contentious, as well as those bringing them forth.

To go back to the system that I suggested, I see it as a political platform that opens up the opportunity for more people to participate in the system. Then if they get more engaged and we start talking more and more, it's a way to engage more people. You encourage them to start talking about these other different alternatives, because right now people are disengaged.

How do you bring them to the political platform where they can start engaging and discussing different ideas about electoral systems? This provides a platform where they can come in and start discussing.

The Chair: Mr. Ste-Marie is next.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: My question was originally for Mr. Patterson, but unfortunately he has to leave to go and take a plane. So I am addressing it to all three of you.

I would like to get back to some things said by the witnesses in the first group, while keeping in mind the principles we have been asked to advance, which are the following: effectiveness and legitimacy; engagement; accessibility and inclusiveness; integrity; and local representation. In the discussions with the first group, Mr. Fleming talked about the need for an elected Senate, and for adopting an electoral system for senators. Mr. Arreak appeared very interested and open to this idea.

I would have liked to hear Mr. Patterson's opinion. In my opinion, this is in keeping with the principles of the committee.

I would like each of you, in turn, to give me your opinion about the idea of an elected Senate.

• (1620)

[English]

Mr. Terry Forth: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I wasn't here to hear Mr. Fleming express those views. I personally believe that an elected Senate is both desirable and workable in Canada. It would go a long way to solve the issues of regional representation for the north. As it stands now, with only one member of Parliament, with all due respect, we don't have a big voice. This would be a way of broadening that voice through an elected Senate and with some legitimacy. That's my view.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Gentlemen, what do you think?

[English]

Mr. Brad Chambers: Thank you.

Should the Senate be elected or not is one of those questions that when asked in isolation has an obvious answer: yes, it should be elected.

My fear is that there are constitutional and regional balance issues. It's messy and complicated. My fear is that I don't want to see that sabotage other reform measures. I don't want to see a referendum that has one omnibus question on Senate reform and electoral reform just sandbag everything. Maybe you could put that on a slower track, but yes, by all means.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Mr. Matshazi, what do you think?

[English]

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: Thank you, Chair.

I would support the elected Senate. One of the reasons the question might come up is the issue of legitimacy, as is being written in the newspapers. Ultimately, it becomes an issue.

The financial costs that have been related to the Senate and its operations draw attention. It's integral to our political capital as a democratic system. To advance and ensure that the august Senate has legitimacy and is perceived in a positive light, we need to have people elected instead of being appointed.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Chambers, my next question is for you, and is about the system you are proposing.

To your knowledge, is there a similar system being used in another country or another region?

[English]

Mr. Brad Chambers: At its heart, it is a hybrid system. The only country I know of that uses it is Panama. I don't really understand why, because it's such a small country. I know that a hybrid system has been posed by Mr. Kingsley, formerly of Elections Canada. I know that Fair Vote Canada has put forward a similar model, as have others.

At its heart, it's a hybrid a system that is not new. As I stated in my speaking notes, I think that's very important. I know that a lot of innovative and creative suggestions have been brought forward, and many of them are interesting, but we can't get too creative and too innovative when we're talking about this. Maybe somewhere in a municipal setting or even a provincial setting it would be great to try new things. At its heart, it's a hybrid system that isn't that dramatic. In fact, most of those advocating a proportional representation system often don't know what to do with the north. They just say we'll keep them all single.

It's actually quite common to be proposing something like this. Really, in what I'm suggesting, it's the process element that's different. I think that has important meaning, but at the end of the day, elections will have integrity and there shouldn't be concerns that it's a wacky new system that will have unintended consequences.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. May is next.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you, and I thank the witnesses for coming.

Brad Chambers, thank you for putting effort into a system that is unique to your proposal. We will be looking at it.

I don't know if it's appropriate to turn to my colleague Scott Reid and say that if we absolutely are going to make observations on voting systems based on what you saw in France, can we all now agree that the first-past-the-post system is definitely dangerous from what we see happening in the U.S. presidential election?

Mr. Scott Reid: One could make some comments about some of the personalities involved in it, if we wished, but perhaps we'll wait until after it's over.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Your answer may trump my question.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Ms. Elizabeth May: Sorry. We should not engage in repartee among the members of Parliament here.

I don't know if this is unfair to you, Mr. Matshazi, but we have not had any witnesses with any experience with the Zimbabwe electoral system. Would you feel comfortable if I were to ask you about your experiences in the electoral system in Zimbabwe before you moved to Canada?

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: Absolutely.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

It's a complicated system. It started out as first past the post. As I understand it, there's a lower house of about 270 persons, for which 210 are elected by first past the post and 60 seats are reserved for women to be elected proportionally. I don't think anyone would hold up a government under the thumb of Mugabe as a great democracy—I hope you will forgive me for saying so—but I wonder if you have any comments on whether that is truly proportional and how first past the post has worked for Zimbabwe. As well, would you have recommendations for us?

We're certainly glad you're in Canada. Congratulations on being elected and keeping all your promises to the citizens of Iqaluit. We've had no one else from Zimbabwe before us, and I'm tempted to ask you about this, if you wouldn't mind commenting.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: Thank you very much.

It's difficult for me to comment on the Zimbabwe situation. That's not to put it down or anything, but I think talking about the level of democracy for a mature democracy and for an emerging democracy—some might say a pseudo-democracy—would be like comparing apples and oranges.

On the concept of proportional representation, in any kind of democracy, if you are striving to build representativeness into a system, I think that is good. One, it builds legitimacy, and two, it draws a lot of people into the political process and gets them engaged.

I think that is the basis of my support for the proportional representation system.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Thank you for that comment.

I turn to Mr. Chambers. I don't know if you've had the opportunity to look at any of the other systems that have been proposed by individual Canadians who have studied them. The one that I wanted to ask you about is Sean Graham's dual-member proportional system. Have you looked at that one?

Mr. Brad Chambers: No, but you mentioned it earlier.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Yes. I'm particularly interested in speaking to witnesses here in Nunavut and in any of the territories about the idea of adding a representative in order to allow a multi-member district without creating a monstrously large one, as we've heard from earlier witnesses.

James Arreak was saying that he did not think that one MP could adequately serve Nunavut because, although the population is numerically small, the location, the distances, and the price of flying from community to community are really prohibitive. He also tied it to health issues. Unless you're in peak physical condition, you can't really make a go of representing all of Nunavut and going regularly to Ottawa.

I don't know if you have any comments on how proportional representation or changing our voting system can accommodate something as complicated as three enormous territories with relatively small population numbers within the territory.

● (1630)

Mr. Brad Chambers: Yes, I do have thoughts on that. I know that it's a pretty hard sell to much of Canada to say that Nunavut should get an extra MP when we already have one MP for 32,000, rather than the average of 125,000 or whatever it is.

I think it's Sweden—and I'm sure you know better than I—that has an area calculation that goes into developing ridings. I think every square kilometre is considered equal to 1.6 people when they do the calculation for how big ridings are.

I did a little math on that, and there would be 22 MPs for Nunavut if Nunavut were in Sweden. That's my starting point, but we could probably negotiate that down to two or something.

There is an argument to be made there that I think can be substantiated. I know it's a difficult sell to much of Canada, but geography and land distances do matter. Two MPs in Nunavut, for this region and the other two regions that are about half the population, is better.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Aldag.

Mr. John Aldag: Councillor, I'm going to start with you.

One of the things that came up when we talked with an earlier panel was the young age of the population in Nunavut. I assume that applies here in Iqaluit. I was trying to find some stats, but I'm fighting a bit with the Internet right now.

I wonder if there are things that Iqaluit has done well to engage with the young population. I don't know if there is great voter turnout and if there are lessons that could be shared with us about how to engage youth.

If it's not working, are there things that have been talked about at the local level about how to better engage youth in the electoral process and system? In the time that you've been involved, have you had those kinds of discussions? We're here, and you may have some insight on that.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I do not pretend to be an expert on the voting process and the behaviour of voters, but with the particular experience that I had when I was running for office I think we have a different experience here. One of my colleagues mentioned that we are very connected in terms of social media platforms. That has really been effective in mobilizing people to discuss issues.

We would like to have a very high young voter population, and that young voter population is really connected to social media. I think that for the purposes of engaging the young population, social media has been effective for us.

I wouldn't want to hazard a guess in identifying some other issues. From my own experience, I wouldn't want to assume massive voter education or any other form of mobilization. It has been about engaging them through social media.

Thank you.

Mr. John Aldag: Thank you.

I had a question for our senator but he had to leave, so Mr. Forth, I'm going to move to you because you talked about the idea of plebiscites and referenda.

It really comes down to simplicity of wording. What I heard from the senator in some of the examples was that when big issues in the territory and territories were being considered, it was the simplicity of wording. They made it very clear.

If you have any thoughts you'd like to offer about this kind of referendum on changing a voting system, how would you see that playing out? Would it be a yes/no, do you want to change the system or not? I think P.E.I. right now is looking at giving multiple options. We've seen the New Zealand model, in which it was a yes/no, with some options given. With the experience and the favourable light that you put on the referendum issue, what advice could you give us on how to approach that, given the experience you've seen in this territory?

• (1635)

Mr. Terry Forth: I don't have a simple straightforward answer, but I think the questions that are ultimately put forward in a plebiscite or a referendum need to be quite simple and quite straightforward. This issue, as it has been laid out, is a very complex one, so I don't have an easy answer, except to say that perhaps the suggestion that has been made by Mr. Cullen that you would stage this somehow or other and introduce it gradually over a period of two or three elections might make the most sense. It would be possible to ease into it and watch what happens and make adjustments accordingly.

That would be my suggestion.

Mr. John Aldag: Okay, great. Thanks.

Then finally, Mr. Chambers, I don't know if you talked about this idea of the petitioning process. I didn't catch the timelines. Have you given any thought about what that would look like, how long it would take to actually engage an election cycle? How much time would you envision? How would that actually flow out with communities, with ridings starting to decide whether they want to merge or stay separate? Do you have any thoughts on that?

Mr. Brad Chambers: It's two steps.

There's some sort of petition process, for lack of a better term, that would determine which of the non-current options is the leading option that you could then put in front of voters in a yes/no question on election day. It could be yes, our riding is going to stay as a single riding, or no, we're going to join this multi-seat group.

Then on election day they would vote on that, and that would kick in for the following election, which could be four years away or could be less. That's the easiest. It's going to be a yes/no question put forward on a riding-by-riding basis.

Where there is any complexity at all is in deciding which option goes to that yes/no ballot on election day, because as I was saying earlier, you need to coordinate. There's some logistical coordination needed. I don't know if it would be Elections Canada that would do that. I don't think the system would have worked 20 years ago. I suspect the largely online process.... In fact, I think that's one of the benefits of it, because I think this would be a way to get our feet wet

with online or other innovative ways of voting. It's related to elections, but it's not actually jumping right to that for an election. It's also a small initial step to experiment with, to go online.

The Chair: Thank you. Thanks very much.

We'll go to Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Mr. Chambers, I have at least one question that hasn't been asked that I want to ask of you, and it's actually sort of the reverse of the question that Ms. Sahota asked you.

She asked about the idea of an island that wanted to remain as a single-member district, surrounded by those who would want to have multi-member districts. Your response was that it shouldn't be much trouble at all, that it could simply stand on its own, and the others could become multi-member districts of some kind.

I want to ask you about the reverse. What if you had an island that wanted to have a multi-member district and it's surrounded by a whole bunch that have elected to stay as a single-member district? What would you do in that scenario with a riding like that, where they're sort of surrounded and nobody around them wants to be grouped together, but they do?

• (1640)

Mr. Brad Chambers: Initially I think you're going to end up with a few oddities, but over time things would settle in. The obvious situation is that urban areas will form multi-seat ridings and a lot of rural and remote areas will stay single, but as I said in my notes, I don't think that's necessarily going to be universal. There may be initially some holdouts and then they may see that it's working well for the other ridings around, and an island in the middle might join. However, in that situation, if no one will dance with them, then they're going to have to dance by themselves, unless they join with a riding in some distant corner of the province, but maybe we don't allow that. There are some details that would have to be worked out, but I don't think any of those are huge or really that problematic.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay.

Mr. Matshazi, I will turn to you because the other three witnesses have all spoken of their preference for some kind of a referendum before implementing any changes. You seem to suggest that there should be a referendum or that people should be asked for their consent to make any kind of change. Was I understanding you correctly?

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I absolutely agree with your observation. I think legitimacy is very important in any democratic process. For instance, a lot of people have talked about proportional representation and maybe one of the reasons people like me and others prefer it is just that we have heard about it, talked about it, and seen it implemented elsewhere. We see it as a platform that can be sold to the people, and then the people can try it out. As I said before, you're bringing more people onto the platform to start this conversation, as opposed to when people are disengaged and feel they are not participating in the political process.

Mr. Blake Richards: I would like to ask all of you briefly for your thoughts on online voting and mandatory voting.

Other witnesses expressed some concerns on this one. One witness had indicated that they were in favour of online voting, but only if Internet connectivity issues could be resolved first. There are some unique challenges in the north for both mandatory voting and online voting, and I want to hear your thoughts as to whether that's something you would be in favour of.

Mr. Terry Forth: I'll comment that I actually have some experience with online voting in Mr. Reid's riding, where I get to vote online municipally, and it's very effective. I believe that notwithstanding the connectivity problems that are faced by many communities here, people in Nunavut would probably embrace the idea of online voting. I think it makes a great deal of sense, particularly if the election happens to fall on a blizzard day, which my member of Parliament can certainly attest to. It can happen frequently and without any warning. I'm very much in favour of it.

Mr. Blake Richards: What about mandatory voting?

Mr. Terry Forth: I'm uncomfortable with that concept that would require people to vote.

Mr. Blake Richards: Do the others have comments on it?

The Chair: Please respond very quickly.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I think mandatory voting might be a good idea, but at the same time, it might give us unnecessary headaches chasing people. What are we going to do if they don't vote? That gives us problems.

In terms of online voting, I think, if given proper incentives and education, particularly for Nunavut, where we have a young population who are highly connected to social media, that would be an excellent option.

• (1645)

Mr. Brad Chambers: In terms of online voting, as I mentioned earlier, I can't imagine that 60 years from now we won't have some form of online voting. It just seems inevitable. The question is, how do we get there, and when?

I think it's all about comfort. As I was saying earlier, I think we need to take measures, but I don't think we're ready to just drop that into federal elections.

As for mandatory voting, I'm not against it, but I think that if we do a good job through the electoral reform process, we will better engage people. Let's see how that goes. I think there should be a mandatory review two or three elections from now of whatever is done. Maybe it could come up then if we aren't doing better by then.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank our panellists for being here and thank the members of the audience for coming out today.

It's my first time here in Iqaluit and I'm delighted to be here in Mr. Tootoo's riding. I would like to convey my condolences on the passing of your former mayor, Mayor Pearson.

Unfortunately the senator has left, but I'm sure you'll all have some feedback for me. He was talking about the culture here of consulting Canadians through plebiscites and said that since passing the Plebiscites Act in 1974, you've had four plebiscites. The 1982 division plebiscite had a participation rate of 52.99%, so that's 53% of the population.

You had a little more success in the 1992 and 1995 plebiscites. One that really stuck out is the 1997 equal representation plebiscite, where you only had approximately 39% of the population participate on such an important question as whether or not to have gender parity in your territorial government. As a couple of witnesses say, there is the importance of taking our time and doing this right, and in some research, it is said that the plebiscite of 1997 was rushed, that folks didn't have the right information, that folks didn't feel engaged, and that there was some dirty politicking, dirty campaigning, happening around that time.

It's close to 20 years since you had that referendum. My concern is whether we are rushing things in terms of trying to fit in a referendum. Are people engaged enough and are they educated enough in this process that we're not going to set ourselves up for failure? I don't want to say that your 1997 referendum was a failure, but 39% participation is not so great.

I'd like to get your feedback on that. What can we be doing, if we are going to go that route, to make sure that we are setting ourselves up for success rather than failure?

Mr. Terry Forth: Again, before you have a referendum or a plebiscite, I think it's extremely important that there be a totally adequate process of education.

I would agree that if the current calendar you're working with is fixed and can't be interfered with in any way, and if our minister is intent on pushing this through Parliament in time to impact on the next election, then it's probably why we need to go to—again, I keep bringing up Mr. Cullen's option—some sort of a staged process, so that the next time around, a referendum would in fact be more feasible rather than this time.

That therefore leads to the suggestion that whatever it is you recommend, you make it feasible and make it a reasonable approach.

•(1650)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you.

Actually, that speaks well to what you've said, Mr. Chambers. You mentioned that “no massive change” should be undertaken right away, that we need to have some time to settle into a new system, and that it should be staged and so on.

Do you think it's best that we maybe take little steps before then, with incremental change, and take this a few years down the line, and then, as you mentioned, maybe two or three elections from now kind of test the temperature to see how it's going, or is it rip off the band-aid and go full throttle?

Mr. Brad Chambers: First of all, what I'm proposing really could kick in right away. It's just that the first election under what I'm proposing would more or less be the same, and then people would make a choice about how things would go forward, and they would continue to have the power to make additional choices.

While we're making a decision about electoral reform, it's a decision that just happens to include a lot of empowerment for the voter. They don't have to make a yes/no referendum decision and then find that everything is out of their hands and we're sailing off on some unknown sea.

Whether or not we're rushing, I think it would be terrible if it appears to the public that we're rushing or being forced. I think it was in the 1982 constitutional work that there was an initial timeline, and then Pierre Trudeau extended it and extended it again. I think that was in recognition that it has to appear to be deliberative. I think that is absolutely fundamental.

On the other hand, I do fear that there's a potential to lose momentum. Who knows what happens after the next general election? Who knows what party may get a majority government, and then just put the kibosh on the whole thing or start over or whatever? I do have fears in that direction as well.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I think that all governments, regardless of whether they are Liberal, Conservative, or NDP, want to engage as many people as they possibly can. In taking a strategic approach to this issue, one of the ways that you can tackle it is by looking at youth education. If we can help people when they are still young and then make them understand why they should participate in politics and in political processes, by the time they get to be 18 years old, they will fully understand their civic duties. They will fully understand what's in it for them, and then they will be able to participate in the system.

I agree with my colleagues that education is fundamentally very important, but let's do more moving forward. Let's target it to the youth, and then as they grow it will be inculcated in them, and they'll grow up with a—

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go now to Mr. Boulерice.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Chambers, I may have the opportunity of getting back to you. I found your Swedish example very instructive. However, if we

applied it, Nunavut would have 22 members and each one would represent about 1,500 people. That is a rather small number as compared to the 110,000 people I represent in my riding in Montreal. That said, we could still discuss it.

Mr. Matshazi, my question is addressed to you, but I would first like to make a comment.

I find it very interesting that someone from Zimbabwe is representing a community with a high percentage of Innu. I imagine that you can have some fascinating discussions on the consequences of British colonialism, but in very different environments.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

•(1655)

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: I quite liked the comments you made earlier. You said we had to find a way of encouraging people to participate more wholeheartedly in their democracy, and that the system should not create distortions between the popular will and the results. You added that there is no perfect system, but that we could and should do better. You want a more representative system.

You have seen the elements we have to work with. Like you, people tell us that they want a more representative system, a system that is more proportional. They also want to preserve the link with the local representative, which is very important.

As a northern elective representative, can you tell us how we could ensure greater proportionality in a territory like Nunavut?

[*English*]

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: Thank you. That's a very interesting question.

I guess we can achieve proportional representation. I think one of the issues is the huge size of Nunavut. I mean, it would be difficult for us to look at proportional representation in terms of numbers. However, if we can look at Nunavut in terms of numbers and also in terms of the geography, I think in several special.... I'm sorry, Mr. Chair, what I'm trying to say is we recognize that we don't have many people, but at the same time we also need people to be fully represented.

Maybe we would say that we can divide our territory into three regions. Then we can have three MPs. The only reason we would do that is to sort of break down the territory, and then, based on even the small number, have those small numbers be involved in the political process.

We don't have the numbers that all the other territories around us have, but at the same time we want to make sure that people are engaged in the process. You understand the unique nature of Nunavut. We shouldn't be punished for being 32,000 people. We should still be incorporated in the political process.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Chambers, we find your hybrid system suggestion interesting. Mr. Jean-Pierre Kingsley also talked about this. However, you added a new element when you wondered if people would want their riding and neighbouring ridings to be merged into one. I imagine that this would mostly be done in more urban or suburban areas.

To my knowledge, you did not say how many ridings would have to be merged, in municipalities or large Canadian cities. Would it be two, or seven? We would need to know, because the degree of proportionality would vary according to the number of ridings that were merged.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Chambers: I think we would end up with a mixed bag. I think we'd have some single ridings. We'd have some ridings in pairs. In the middle of Toronto and Montreal, perhaps we'd have 10 or 15 ridings that could conceivably merge together if they wanted.

I don't think we need to cap that or set criteria for it. I think it can be organic. That's the whole philosophy that I'm bringing forward, and over time people will form opinions on it. Maybe they'll decide that a two-MP riding is not that proportional and they don't really like it.

We haven't really talked about what the balloting would look like in either of those types of ridings, and that's not really a major point of discussion. However, let's say it's preferential balloting or something; you could end up with very large ballots if you had 10 or 15 ridings.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Or lists.

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Chambers: At some point at least, you would have to switch from a candidate preferential ballot to a party preferential ballot. There are complications, but again let voters decide. If they don't like the size of their multi-riding unit, then they can change it.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Nater now has the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you again to our panellists for the excellent insights today. It has been fascinating.

I'm going to start a little off topic and then try to work my way back, and hopefully I'll get back to the issue at hand.

Senator Patterson, for example, currently has a bill before the Senate, Bills-221. It deals with Senate representation. It would remove the property requirement to be appointed a senator. It's not going to change the overall makeup of the Senate. It's not going to change how senators are appointed. It's not going to change how senators are elected. However, it is a move that I think would be a small step towards recognizing some of the unique challenges of the north.

Property ownership, as we know, is not as common in the north as it is in the southern part of Canada, so it's an important change to the

Senate that does not undertake a substantial change that would necessarily take a long period of time in consultation.

In the panel prior to this one, there were some suggestions that campaigning in Nunavut and in the north is a challenge. It's costly; it's time consuming. There was a suggestion that there should be some kind of subsidy, some kind of financial benefit to help in campaigning, in representing some northern areas. Again, it's a change that would certainly support the north, would help in the north, but it wouldn't necessarily change the overall structure of our electoral system in Canada.

That leads into the comments we've heard from this panel and previous panels that this electoral reform change shouldn't be rushed. We should take our time. We don't want to rush into something without fully exploring all the options.

Where I'm going with this is that in an effort not to rush into wholesale fundamental change but still keep the discussion going, are there recommendations that each of you would have to help the north be better represented in Ottawa, better able to undertake that representation, that wouldn't necessarily change the fundamental makeup of our electoral system? Are there changes you would recommend in the short term that we could implement fairly quickly that would improve engagement of Nunavut and of the northern territories? Do you have any thoughts on any short-term changes we could make quickly?

• (1700)

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: If we're looking at the short to medium term, I think one approach would be to accept the uniqueness of Nunavut, and instead of having just one MP, we could have three MPs. Each MP would represent a region. There are three regions: Kivalliq, Kitikmeot, and Qikiqtaaluk. To me, that's low-hanging fruit.

Mr. Terry Forth: I would agree. Three members of Parliament would be a big step forward. I suspect it might be low-hanging fruit, but likely not fruit that can easily be picked, unfortunately.

I think the alternative would be to build in some fairly significant budgetary measures that would give members of Parliament, and even those running for Parliament, access to funds that would make it more feasible to represent this population. I think that's critical.

On the issue of the bill that Senator Patterson has brought forward, my understanding is that property ownership barely exists here, not just out of choice but because of our system of not having land title. Therefore, very few people would qualify to become senators. Some kind of reform system along those lines would be a big help. I would think you'd have to do it across Canada, though. You couldn't just do it in Nunavut.

Mr. Brad Chambers: I don't have anything informed to add.

The Chair: Finally, we'll go to Mr. DeCoursey.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I don't expect to take too long, because this issue has been brought up by a number of my other colleagues. It's the notion of incrementalism and of an approach that would allow for people to feel some level of comfort with the change.

The question that I have, or what I'll leave you with, is a final comment on this notion of our finding a solution or solutions that allow for incremental changes to take place so that people can feel comfortable. If we were able to do that, does it allow us to evade the need to put any big question to a plebiscite?

• (1705)

Mr. Brad Chambers: To answer the second question first, I haven't had a chance to give my thoughts on a referendum yet, and I think that is a vital decision-making point going forward. I think that integrity and legitimacy are as much about the process as they are about the product, and democracy needs to be democratic. It seems absurd to me that this decision will be made any other way.

Some people said that multi-party consensus is efficient, but there are some systems that favour existing parties over parties that aren't even born yet or aren't really on the radar. Even multi-party consensus is a biased way of making a decision.

I think a lot of people are backing away from a referendum because they're afraid that they'll lose the referendum and we'll end up back where we started, not because they're philosophically against it. That's why I think it's important to come up with a system—which is what I've tried to do—that keeps some power in the hands of the voters, so that they don't get a one-shot deal at giving input on this issue. It's harder to do incremental electoral reform. I don't really see too many good options for doing it in pieces, but at some point you have to decide which system we're going to have. The way to make it incremental is to continue to give them decision-making power on an ongoing basis.

I forget the first part of your question that I haven't answered yet.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: No, that was the whole question.

Mr. Terry Forth: I don't have any magic answers, unfortunately, but I do believe that regardless of how long it takes or what sort of incremental approach is put in place, there does need to be a referendum or an opportunity for Canadians to express an opinion.

Mr. Kuthula Matshazi: I'm thinking changing any system is a process, and one of the levers that we can use is education, but education will take a long time. Education is very useful for us to change the attitudes in people who understand their civic duties. Proportional representation will help us engage people in the political process. If they are now engaged in the political process, then over time it becomes incremental and people start engaging in discussing issues of civic duty and so forth. They start engaging in the political process. I think proportional representation is a platform on which we can move this incremental change into a different system.

Mr. Brad Chambers: Could I make one quick point on that? A referendum can be divisive, and we should stay away from them, but this isn't Charlottetown and this isn't Brexit. I don't see neighbours throwing rocks at each other's windows because they prefer a single-member vote over MMP.

The Chair: Thank you.

That wraps up the round. Thank you so much to our witnesses. It's been a good discussion. It's nice to meet someone who lives in Lac-Saint-Louis. I don't know what it was called at the time, but it was very nice to meet you, Mr. Forth.

Mr. Matshazi, thank you very much for your very interesting testimony and for relating your experiences in Zimbabwe. Mr. Chambers, thank you for your original idea that you defended so well.

We scheduled an open mike session after this panel. Is there anyone in the room who would like to say anything about electoral reform? We would invite you to the table rather than bring out the mike. If anyone in the audience would like to say anything, let us know by raising your hands. No? Okay, good; we're fine.

We'll suspend until six o'clock. Thank you very much.

• (1710)

(Pause)

• (1825)

The Chair: I declare this final segment of our day of hearings here in Iqaluit open, and I'd like to welcome our four witnesses for this evening.

We have with us Mr. Jack Anawak. Nice to see you again, Mr. Anawak. We have with us as well Mr. Paul Okalik, member of the legislative assembly, constituency of Iqaluit-Sinaa, but also, notably, the first premier of Nunavut. It's an honour to meet you this evening. We also have Mr. Franco Buscemi. Nice to meet you again, Mr. Buscemi. Finally, from the Baffin Chamber of Commerce, we have Mr. Victor Tootoo.

I can tell this is going to be a great panel.

We'll start with Mr. Anawak.

Mr. Jack Anawak (As an Individual) (Interpretation): *Qujannamiik.*

There was nothing written in Inuktituk to tell me where I was supposed to go. There were no directions as to where we were to go to.

Thank you for coming to Nunavut.

I am only hearing myself. Sorry, there are technical problems.

A voice: What channel is English?

• (1830)

The Chair: We have to wait. We have to sort out the translation.

It seems good now. Everything's good.

Mr. Jack Anawak: Do I start over?

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Jack Anawak: *Qujannamiik.*

Thank you.

As I said earlier, as I was walking in there was nothing written in Inuktituk to tell me where I was supposed to go. If I didn't speak English or French, I would not know where to go because there are no directions in Inuktituk. You are in Nunavut, and there are three official languages in Nunavut—English, French, and Inuktituk.

Thank you for coming to Nunavut, and I am grateful for the opportunity to address the committee and to speak to the concerns of Nunavummiut regarding electoral reform and democracy.

I will go back to English.

We have 26 communities spread across an area the size of western Europe. There are more than 400 million people in western Europe. There are 37,000 of us in Nunavut. We make up one-tenth of one per cent of the population of Canada, yet our land comprises one-fifth of Canada.

In a way, Nunavut is a microcosm of Canada, a vast land, sparsely populated by international standards. We joke about how Americans see us, see Canada—not just us, but Canada. They think it's all igloos and dog teams and lumberjacks, yet this is how many southern Canadians see Nunavut. For the record, we don't have any lumberjacks up here.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jack Anawak: I speak to you today as a former hamlet councillor in a community, as a mayor, a former member of the legislative assembly, a territorial minister, a former candidate for federal office, and a former member of Parliament.

When it comes to our electoral system, our concerns are twofold: promoting participation and supporting candidates and voters, and ensuring our interests are properly represented and promoted in Ottawa.

As to promoting participation and supporting candidates and voters, as you may have heard, the cost of living up here is very high. I encourage the committee members to visit the Northmart and Arctic Ventures to get a sense of how high the cost of living is and to see the prices of our groceries. A person considering running for office here has to consider forgoing income for the duration of the campaign. While this is true in many ridings, we have high costs for food, housing, electricity, heating fuel, and child care. For us, choosing to run for office usually means living off our savings in the most expensive riding in the country.

Finding ways to support more candidates to consider running for office has to be part of any discussion on electoral reform in Nunavut. I don't know what form this could take, but I know that it has discouraged many good-quality candidates from running for office. They can't afford to take anywhere from a few weeks to 78 days off from work.

It also means travelling throughout the campaign. We're a huge territory. While our territory is measured in millions of square kilometres, many ridings in southern Canada, southern cities, are just a few square kilometres in size. Just for the record, when I was running in 1993 for re-election, I happened to go down to Ottawa and drove around six ridings in a matter of a couple of hours. Here there are 26 communities spread across about 900,000 square miles. It has to all be by air. There are no roads connecting.

You can understand our situation when running for office up here in Nunavut.

● (1835)

It means strategically choosing which communities we have time to visit and which communities we can afford to visit. Candidates here spend thousands and thousands of dollars in airfare just to be able to meet voters. Can you imagine doing that in your riding? For a

candidate, it means having limited opportunities to meet with voters across the territory. For voters, it may mean to only have a single opportunity to meet a candidate in your community, if they can afford to visit your community at all.

Electoral reform for us is more than changing the voting system. It means encouraging our system to be one that encourages candidates and voters to participate in a democratic process.

Iqaluit, the capital of Nunavut, is the easternmost community in Nunavut. We are almost due north of Ottawa. Kugluktuk is our westernmost community, almost due north of Edmonton or Calgary. On top of being very spread out, our communities have large variations in geography, culture, language, economic opportunity, and priorities. Can each of you imagine representing a riding that has as much variation between communities as Ottawa, Winnipeg, and Calgary, and everyone in between with all those differences?

Although our population is small, an MP in Nunavut has to contend with these variations in community dynamics and priorities. We have to try to represent everyone despite having limited communication with each community in a cohesive way in Ottawa. Suffice it to say it's very difficult to do so effectively, no matter how hard you work as a member of Parliament.

Electoral reform for us has to recognize that not only our population but our size has to be a consideration in the way we elect MPs and the number of people we elect to represent us.

I'll revert back to Inuktitut.

I sincerely hope that regardless of which voting system you adopt, you consider granting an extra seat in the House of Commons to reflect Nunavut's unique needs and challenges and to ensure that our hopes, aspirations, priorities, and politics are accurately reflected in the House of Commons in Ottawa.

I thank you for this opportunity to address you and I hope that your visit is very worthwhile.

Qujannamiik . Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you. We're having a great visit, and thank you for painting that picture of not only life in this vast territory, but the life of a political representative in this vast territory. It's very interesting to contrast and compare to, as you were mentioning, the more compact urban ridings that many of us are from.

We'll move on now to Mr. Okalik, please.

● (1840)

Hon. Paul Okalik (Member of the Legislative Assembly, Constituency of Iqaluit-Sinaa, As an Individual) (Interpretation): *Qujannamiik. Merci.*

Thank you to all of you for giving us and the people who are here with me, my colleagues, an opportunity to speak in front of you.

What I'm going to basically talk about are the things you're going to consider. I will probably talk more in Inuktituk and I will also speak in English.

First of all, I'd like to talk about elections, so I'm going to start with having arrangements so that people can vote. This is my concern here in Nunavut, a concern that the Nunavummiut have.

Every year, at one time of the year, we hunt for our food, so if there should be an election when we are out hunting, this would create some conflict for the hunter. You have to consider the aspect that people do go out hunting. Elections are very important, but surviving with our country food as well is important, so this is what I'm going to start with.

The other thing you can consider is online computer voting. I have done that myself, but the addresses of the websites are written in English and in French only. They do not represent Inuit. How are they going to deal with the technical issues? We don't want them to be left behind with the kinds of issues they have just because they can't speak the language.

I will return to English.

Perhaps the final area that I would like to focus on in my brief presentation is that I have no real issues with the current practice of first past the post, as it has been our system for quite some time. If you are looking for alternatives, I would have some reservations about the proportional representation model, as it pretty much creates a permanent minority government, and that in itself creates challenges. I do not envy countries that try to govern under this system. I, being a Canadian, would be concerned that such a system could fracture our nation into regional, linguistic, and cultural divisions.

As you can see in our own territory system, we have a consensus model, which is the same thing as a permanent minority government, and it does have its challenges. For that reason, I would have to say that the proportional representation model is a bit of a concern.

If it's the desire and the will of the committee to move forward with a different model, I stress that it should be as simple and as clear as possible for all concerned. The alternative vote model would be my preference, as it maintains the clarity and simplicity to the voters and is in keeping with their wishes.

To conclude, if the committee could also recommend on changing how the senators are chosen in our country, I want to be able to elect mine. Please recommend a vote for our senators. That would be a perfect model for us here in our own territory, so we could have real representation in the Senate too.

Qujannamiik. Thank you.

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

It was very interesting to hear the perspective of someone who is familiar with the consensus government model but who has also held important executive power here in Nunavut.

We'll move on now to Mr. Buscemi, please, for 10 minutes.

• (1845)

Mr. Franco Buscemi (As an Individual): *Qujannamiik.*

I'm going to speak about some of the barriers I believe contribute to Nunavut's low voter turnout.

I'm going to start with the very first election that we were allowed to vote in. The first time the Innu had the right to vote dates back to 1953, the 22nd Parliament.

Then, in 1977, 10 years after the Toronto Maple Leafs won their last Stanley Cup, the first senator from the area that's now known as Nunavut was appointed. In 1977, in the 31st Parliament, the Innu had a representative in Parliament for the first time. I don't remember it, but that was not very long ago.

In 1993 Nunavut finally had a dedicated seat in the Senate, whereas before the Nunavut rep was one of the three NWT reps.

Since 1977, when Nunavut got its first representative, we've had two different senators and six different MPs. Since 2015, we haven't had a representative in Parliament who could speak Inuktitut. Nunavut makes up 21% of Canada's land mass.

It's 6:47 here and Nunavut stretches across three time zones. It's 5:47 in Arviat, 4:47 in Taloyoak, all in the same territory.

If you want to travel east or west in Nunavut, it will take you two days. You'll have to leave the territory. The Nunavut MP represents two million square kilometres. The MP from NWT represents 1.3 million square kilometres. The Yukon MP represents 483,000 square kilometres. St. John's, Newfoundland, has 446 square kilometres and has two MPs. Charlottetown has 44 square kilometres and an MP.

Other barriers I've observed are that many of the political platforms in campaigns include plans to address issues that have been challenging Nunavut for as long as I can remember. Anyone in their thirties would have lived in conditions or witnessed high levels of poverty and overcrowded housing. A lot of people suffer from PTSD, with little or no mental health services to deal with these...I hesitate to say "historical" traumas, because a lot of these traumas are from the 1950s and as early as the 1980s, and a lot of them continue today.

There is a lack of reconciliation between Canada and the Inuit. There has been no substantial investment in the people of the Arctic. The investment that we've seen historically in the Arctic often has been motivated by a military agenda. More recently it is related to resource extraction.

• (1850)

There's a continued denial of a devastating dog slaughter carried out by the RCMP from the 1950s. If MPs represent Canadians, MPs in the practical sense are represented by government departments, programs, and services, and our interactions with government often haven't very positive from the very early days.

We haven't done very much to adjust this. It took a lot from the Nunavut land claim organization, Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, for the Government of Canada to invest some funds in an Inuit employment plan, which is in the agreement that the government signed.

Nunavut has three regions: the Kivalliq, the Kitikmeot, and the Qikiqtaaluk, more commonly known as Baffin. I believe that if we had three seats in the Senate in our current model, it would adjust some of the representational issues we suffer from in our great land mass. The reason I say this is that if we can have three guaranteed representatives in the Senate, that will ensure we have three MPs in Parliament under the current model that was adopted in 1985.

The reason I bring up things like overcrowded housing, poverty, and abuse is that if you're not sure where you're sleeping, or if you're sleeping in shifts, and if you're not sure what your next meal is going to be or when it's going to be, and if you're not sure when the next time you're going to be sexually abused or physically abused will be, who really cares when the next election is?

I hate to leave you on such a sad note, but that's the reality of the territory. I'm going to leave it at that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Buscemi.

Thank you for that description of recent political events that have shaped Nunavut. You're right. The events you mention were not that long ago. In fact, I can remember the last time the Leafs won the cup. I'm not that old. I was just a kid, but being from Montreal, I was very disappointed .

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

Mr. Victor Tootoo (Baffin Regional Chamber of Commerce): Thank you.

[Witness speaks in Inuktitut]

I wanted to thank Franco for talking about some of the difficult issues.

I'm representing the Baffin Regional Chamber of Commerce. I was asked to come here today to be a witness. My understanding of why you're here is to look at better ways to represent the views of Canadians and improving public trust. I got that off the website.

How to do that is not necessarily about changing the entire system. The system we have now is not broken. Single-member plurality is the status quo. Some of the knocks against it are mounting viable candidacies across the wide range of territory and space, especially in Nunavut, and low voter turnout. I think that's the issue. Low voter turnout is the issue in Nunavut and across Canada.

What do you do about voter apathy?

They say that poor voter turnout happens because of disenchantment, indifference, and complacency. People don't care. Is it because they watch CPAC, and they watch what's going on in the House, and they say, "I'd rather not vote for somebody like that?" I don't know if that's accurate or not, but it's a possibility.

Let's talk about the different types of options or systems that we've seen here and in other parts of the world.

In 2005, B.C. came up with a single transferable vote, which is pretty much a ranking of candidates. Even though they got a 58% yes, because they were doing it by referendum, it had to be 60% in order for them to make that change. It didn't get changed in B.C. Perhaps that's an indicator of referendums across our nation and their effectiveness, or lack thereof.

There are a number of different options for electoral systems and their reform. Another is the mixed member proportional system that New Brunswick brought forward and reported on. You can have regional party lists with that system as well. There is also the runoff voting or alternative voting that Paul Okalik just mentioned.

One of the things that most of the witnesses here will remember is that prior to 1999, during the division and creation of Nunavut, there was also a discussion about dual-gender ridings. The idea was to have one man and one woman elected from each riding in our territory. That's another consideration as well.

Those are considerations in contemplating a change to the type of system that you have, but remember that I said at the beginning that I don't think the system is broken. I don't think it needs to be fixed. However, you do need to deal with voter turnout.

There are other ways that you can address that. One is ballot design. Another is voting equipment; Paul also talked about that in terms of the choices of how you're able to vote. As well, there are nomination rules and political party rules.

There is also the eligibility to vote. Our organization is called Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated, and in our land claim beneficiary voting, the eligibility age for voting is 16.

What is this about voter turnout? The theory is that the probability of a person voting, times the benefit of that person voting, plus the duty or stratification of that person voting, have to outweigh the cost.

● (1855)

Most of the other witnesses today have talked about the factors that go into the cost to vote here in Nunavut versus the factors that go into the cost to vote in the ridings that you are from. I don't know where every single person here is from, but I'm assuming that you have less distance to cover in your riding than you do here.

How do we get people interested in voting again here in Nunavut? I think if you consider something like a mobile polling station in the smaller communities, with people who are fluent in Inuktitut going to elders' facilities or to their homes to record or get their ballots or get their vote in some form or another, you would increase voter turnout in Nunavut at a lower cost. You can't do this across the whole country. I understand that in larger ridings you would have to go to, I don't know, 10,000 voters, but in a small community in Nunavut, if you want to get to the elders, there would be 10, 20, 40, or 50.

Paul also mentioned the timing of elections. It seems these days that elections in Nunavut never happen on a warm summer day—I can't recall that ever being the case—when it is easiest for people with disabilities to go somewhere. You've been outside here in Iqaluit today and you've seen how slippery it is. Imagine you are in a wheelchair and you're trying to get to a polling station in December in Nunavut, and this is Iqaluit. This is the capital of our territory. This is the best our territory has to offer for people with disabilities. The amount of culture shock you would get coming from Saint-Louis in Montreal to here is similar to what you would get in going from here to Qikiqtarjuaq or Kimmirut, even though Kimmirut is only 100 miles away.

Therefore, making it easier for a person to vote in Nunavut would increase voter turnout.

I'm not sure that the only reason you guys are here is to talk about better representing the views of Canadians and improving public trust. I know you want to consider other options for our electoral system, and by all means. That's why we live in a democracy: it's so everybody can consider the different options that they have placed before them, but I don't think our current system is broken. I think you need to be able to incent people to vote, and it's not with a stick. Mandatory voting would be difficult to enforce in Iqaluit, let alone smaller communities in Nunavut, or to implement. I think you do it with a carrot and you make a public display of your actions to show something worth voting for.

That's it for me. Thank you.

• (1900)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I have a feeling we're going to have a really great discussion.

Indeed, we're here because we're interested in gaining different perspectives from across the country, and this is a very special perspective. I mean, for many of us, it's the first time we've been here; we want to be able to factor those perspectives into our thinking about electoral reform, and you certainly delivered some excellent testimony.

Without further ado, we'll go to our round of questioning. We'll start with Ms. Sahota for five minutes, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd like to especially thank all the witnesses and all of the people here from the community who are in attendance and hopefully will participate in the open mike tonight.

The testimony was very real. I think it will be very memorable for us going back and deliberating on what we're going to come up with. Thank you for that. As the chair said, this is my first time in Iqaluit also, and it's been quite the experience, even though I haven't been able to go very far. Just to get the perspective that we're getting in this room today, it's been quite emotional even to sit here and listen.

One thing I do want to explore is the consensus voting system that you have here at legislature. You talked about it a little bit, Mr. Okalik. Can you explain? It's very rare. NWT has the consensus model, and you have it here, I believe. I may be wrong or I may be fuzzy on the facts, but how does that end up working? You said it could be quite difficult to get legislation through or “get anything

done”, I think, were your words. Can you elaborate a little bit more on that, because it sounds great? To an outside person, it sounds like the ideal model to try to work towards. Could I get a little insight on how that works?

• (1905)

Hon. Paul Okalik: The consensus model is a carry-over from the NWT, which we are a part of. There are 22 ridings, and each individual runs on their own platform and gets elected. From there, there is a formal leadership forum where candidates for premier and ministers are vetted and chosen by all the 22 members that ran for office.

The cabinet ministers are always required to be a minority in that assembly, so it's a permanent minority government. I think some of you have worked under the minority model, and it can be challenging for all concerned. You never really get the outcome that you desire, because you have to work with all members. You never really know the results, because as long as you appease the majority of the assembly, you'll stay in government regardless of what progress you make or not for your own territory. That's the model that we're working under today. It's not ideal at times.

That's why I prefer the party system in some ways. It's because you run on a mandate. You get elected and you deliver, because you have the majority. In our system, that doesn't always happen. We have to work with all members to make sure that you try to produce as much as you can. It's a different system, but it's also a very challenging system.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: When looking at different models, we've often been throwing around these words, which you will hear from the experts, that through a proportional system, we probably would have coalition governments or minority governments. Sometimes you'd have co-operation and sometimes it's compromise. Both have different connotations.

On one side, people will advocate for a thing. You are working together and you're going to come up with better policies that cater to more people. On the other side of it, you're going to end up compromising. You're never going to know what the end results will be and what you'll get, and maybe more people will be dissatisfied with the results.

What is your perspective on that? Do you think you end up with more compromise or more coordinated efforts and more co-operation?

Hon. Paul Okalik: In our current system, you can't really promise anything, because you don't know if you will be part of the government at any point in time. You can't really promise results. Therefore, you have to do your part in trying to deliver as much as you can for your riding.

It's something that I think we have to really examine ourselves. That will take a bit of time. I also studied political science in university, so I studied various models in school. With the models that I've looked at, I have issues and concerns regarding proportional representation.

Look at our country. We had the Bloc not too long ago. I didn't really enjoy watching that part and the way our country was fractured into cultural, linguistic, and regional factions. Yes, the current system has its flaws, but it's better than proportional representation. In trying to govern, a minority government is at times stable, but it can create a lot of instability, and I don't think we need that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Okalik.

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

Mr. Scott Reid: First of all, thank you to all our witnesses for, I think, one of the best panels we've had across the country. It is really informative.

I also want to thank my colleague Ms. Sahota for raising a line of questioning that I think has been very informative, and I want to continue that line of questioning. I mean no disrespect to the other panellists when I focus on Mr. Okalik to continue this line of questioning.

Your territory, along with the NWT, are the only two in Canada that operate a parliamentary system without a party system overlying it. Of course, the parliamentary system—I won't say it was designed, because in a sense nobody designed it—evolved over a period of several hundred years with parties in place. They were a feature from the early 1700s in England and onward. Therefore, we really have very few models to draw upon to see what it would look like if we don't have the government-opposition model, which was how it evolved first in England. Then when it came to Canada, there was an enormous amount of pressure. There was an expectation that you would form into a government and a shadow government, a government and an opposition.

This raises a number of questions. You've dealt with some of them, some of the problems that are associated with not having a party system, such as the difficulty of making promises and not being able to have a platform or a mandate in the sense that we have now outside these two territories.

I want to ask about a different issue that may or may not be a problem. You may have found a resolution to it.

At the federal level and in our provinces, there is an expectation that when the prime minister or premier and the cabinet lose the confidence of the assembly, they are dismissed and an election is called. Is that how things are handled here, or are they handled differently through a replacement of the cabinet, while no election is called?

• (1910)

Hon. Paul Okalik: We go through a mid-term review. We had one halfway through this current mandate. The members assessed the progress and the work produced by the various cabinet ministers. One minister fell, was voted out. It's a system of checks and balances on how the government is doing. After that, there are really no checks. They pretty much have another three-year pass, because as long as they appease a couple of members from the other side, they maintain a majority. That's how the system works. It's not always healthy.

In a party system, you go in with a clear mandate and you produce the results; if you don't, good luck in the next election.

Mr. Scott Reid: In the system we use in Ottawa and in the provinces, your party is elected, and you have a party leader. Whether you're in government or opposition, the party leaders then select the individuals who will fulfill various portfolios. For example, I am in the shadow cabinet as the critic for democratic institutions and Blake is the deputy critic because our leader, Rona Ambrose, at her own absolute discretion, decided to do that. She could have done the reverse. That's true for every cabinet minister as well.

However, it sounds to me as though that is not how it works here. I gather that it is not the case. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm assuming that the premier does not get chosen and then turn around and say, "and this person, that person, and that person will be become members of cabinet, and I'll put them into the following portfolios." I'm assuming that the legislature as a whole makes those decisions.

Hon. Paul Okalik: Yes. The members elect all the cabinet ministers, and then the premier assigns the portfolios from there. The only real authority of the leader in our territory is to assign portfolios, and they also used to be able to appoint deputy ministers. I don't know what the practice is today.

It's rather a weak system of parliament. It's had its day, and I think we're past that point. That's how we exercise it today. That was the first real ministerial removal where a minister fell. That's the first time it's happened as a ministerial review. It's a secret ballot. It's like your party system when you have a secret ballot to assess your leader. That's how we still do the check in our system.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Reid.

We'll go to Mr. Cullen now.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you, Chair, and thank you to our witnesses. It's nice to be here. *Nakurmiik*.

I'll start with Mr. Buscemi. I thought your testimony was incredibly powerful and, unfortunately, too familiar to a lot of places in this country. I represent northern British Columbia, up against the Yukon and Alaska borders. What you described in terms of people's priorities—not having a safe place to sleep, not having good food, and the threat or the actuality of violence—means that electoral reform isn't hitting your radar.

One of the criticisms of the current way we vote in this country is that we like to throw the bums out, as they say. There's something satisfying in that, right? You have a government for a while, and if you don't like them, you toss them all out. First past the post does an okay job of that. The difference between the winner and the loser can be a few percentage points, but the change can be 100% when it comes to being in power.

It's been proposed to us that longer-term issues, such as poverty and climate change, don't do well when every eight to 10 years, or so, the country flips, and all the stuff that was being done is reversed by the new government as part of their promises. The new guys come in with their agenda for a while, and then they get thrown out. I think you can maybe see where I'm going.

We've heard from young people that one of the reasons they don't vote is they don't think it matters. One vote's not going to affect anything, or they live in a place where we already know who's going to win. Some of the systems that we're considering give more chances for each vote to matter.

Is this too far away from trying to draw people back in, or draw them in for the first time into having that voice, which is what I believe a vote should be—a voice, and some power in their world—or am I too far away from that?

• (1915)

Mr. Franco Buscemi: Thank you for the question.

When I was looking at the voter turnout for this region, every year the number of voters was pretty consistent. I think there was a larger youth voter turnout on this last election. There was a lot of hype around it.

I can only speak for myself. With any election, and not just a federal election, as an Inuk, I'm represented by two Inuit land claim organizations, one national Innu organization, and one international Innu organization. That's on the Inuit side. Then I have the municipal election, then the territorial election, and then the federal election. I feel a bit overrepresented at times.

There was excitement. I could feel the excitement in this last election. It was different from others. I wasn't overly excited. It takes a lot for me to get excited. Definitely I think a common question is, "What's the point of voting?"

Victor mentioned a mobile poll. I believe it would do very well. Some of our organizations, because they have fewer restrictions, have experimented with having mobile polls. They've had great success going through the high school, going through the elders' centre, and going to the store where people already are. I think those are things that can adjust voter turnout, which is really the problem. I don't think there are a lot of people dissatisfied with the system here.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Do you have any thoughts on lowering the voting age itself? It's one of the things this committee is looking at. It's 18 right now, so maybe it could be 17 or even 16.

I don't know if you have any comment on that.

Mr. Franco Buscemi: I think dropping it to 16 isn't a bad idea. I don't think it will increase voter turnout, but you learn to drive at 16. It's not a bad time to learn how to vote too.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Thank you.

Mr. Anawak, it's good to see you. You raised your hand earlier; I don't know if you still have that same thought.

Mr. Okalik put forward some ideas about the challenges of working in consensus-based governments or minority governments. I've been elected under both types of regimes. I actually enjoyed minority. It's a lot more nimble, a lot more active. Majorities tend to

concentrate power a bit, at least in the Ottawa system. I don't want to speak for the territory here.

I'm wondering if you have any thoughts to add to what Mr. Buscemi was talking about earlier. I saw your hand go up, and I don't want to let this time go without your having a chance to speak.

• (1920)

Mr. Jack Anawak: *Qujannamiik.* Thank you.

Just carrying on from what Mr. Okalik was saying, when you have a consensus government and you have a legislative assembly of 22 members, that's like having 22 parties. There really is not much accountability, so there really is not much of a chance. Even if you're operating in a minority, as cabinet does, because you have a cabinet of eight, including the premier, the rest of the members don't really have the cohesiveness to throw the bums out, because there is no party system. Even if there is a constant minority, there is really no accountability because there are no party politics, so it doesn't really matter how... For lack of a better word, there really is not much of an opportunity for it to work all that well, because 13 so-called opposition members have 13 different ideas of what to do.

The party system works even in a territory like Greenland. They have a party system. Even though I think they're smaller than Nunavut, they have a party system. The Yukon has a party system. I think with a party system we'd probably be better off in Nunavut.

At the same time, when you have only one representative in the House of Commons, I know it's very hard for them to keep in touch with the people because of the size of the territory. As I said earlier, you could go through six different ridings in about two hours down south. Here you have to go to 26 different communities. When I was a member of Parliament, it took a year to go to each and every community at least once. Without a party system up here it's very hard, as I'm sure the former premier knows.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll go to Mr. Ste-Marie now, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Good evening, gentlemen.

As my colleague Mr. Reid was saying, you are one of the most interesting groups of witnesses. This trip has certainly been worth it. I am happy to listen to you. Your testimony is very touching.

Once again, we see the reality of a remote area, vast spaces and a northern climate. This leads to a lot of challenges in the area of communications, either in accessing the Internet or ground transportation.

Mr. Anawak said that there are 26 communities in Nunavut that are not connected by roads.

Mr. Okalik, I believe you said that there are 22 elected representatives in the Nunavut Legislative Assembly. This led Mr. Buscemi to say that he sometimes feels overrepresented, because aside from the members of the Legislative Assembly, there are municipal elected representatives.

I am discovering your territorial assembly system. Do you think it has too many elected representatives? The ratio is about one representative for 1,500 people, but they are dispersed over a wide area.

Would anyone like to address that point?

• (1925)

[English]

Hon. Paul Okalik: I believe there are too many. At the same time, our territory is very big, so it can be a challenge. We started with 19. We are 22 with our small territories, so there's a little overrepresentation at times. It was the choice of the last assembly, so we are following through with that at the moment.

Without a party system, you can't really do anything to fix it, because there's no discipline. In a party system, you promise something that you'll... I recall that in Ontario they used to have a lot more representatives, and one party said they were going to cut it back, and they did. Without a party system, we're stuck with the current system that we have. There's no discipline, no consequences.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Thank you.

Mr. Tootoo, do you agree with that? You seem to want to speak.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: I do not agree. I like the number 22; in English, it's my name.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Very well, thank you.

[English]

Mr. Victor Tootoo: That's not the only reason I disagree. I don't feel that Nunavummiut are overrepresented at a territorial level, a national level, or an international level. In fact, I think quite the opposite. I think we are under-represented.

[Translation]

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie: Very well, thank you.

Mr. Tootoo, you spoke of the voting age being 16 at the territorial level, if I understood correctly.

Would you be favourable to lowering the voting age to 16 in federal elections?

My question is addressed to all four of our guests.

[English]

Mr. Franco Buscemi: To the first question, as an individual, I feel overrepresented by all the different levels of government. At the federal level, I feel the territory is under-represented. It has nothing to do with our population; it's about land mass. We just have too much land for one person to cover.

Yes, I believe voting at 16 would be very good because you have students you can easily engage. You know where to find them. They're at school. Actually, they would probably become some of the most informed voters, because it would become part of their studies.

[Translation]

Hon. Paul Okalik: Yes.

[English]

I would agree.

Mr. Jack Anawak: When we're teenagers, we know everything, right?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Jack Anawak: They're already in high school anyway, and that would be, I'm sure, part of their curriculum. I don't think there's any problem with having 16 as a voting age.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: Yes, I agree that lowering the voting age to 16 is a good idea in getting more voter turnout. I think Franco mentioned earlier the buzz in this past election, and I think of myself at 16, and I look at my 16-year-old children and how much more politically astute they are compared to how astute I was at that time. That's in part due to technology and social media and all the information that's available to us at our fingertips these days, but I also think that it is in part due to, for lack of a better term, the political acumen of youth these days, right across this country.

Youth are more astute in what's happening at the municipal, territorial, provincial, and national level. I think it's tied to the fact that they care about what's happening around them, and they want a say. I think that applies to Nunavut and to everybody across the country. If you lower the voting age to 16, you are going to see a higher voter turnout in terms of percentage from that cohort of the population, that particular demographic, and because of their instant access to education, and education regarding our electoral system, you'll have more informed voters.

• (1930)

[Translation]

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

The Chair: Ms. May, you have the floor.

[English]

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

I also wanted to take note and thank the people from Iqaluit, the citizens who are sitting in the audience tonight, and this very excellent panel as well.

I had chance to speak with Maatalii Okalik earlier, and I hope she'll come to the mike, not to put too much pressure on her. She's president of the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami Youth Council.

Just last month the parliamentary committee on indigenous and northern affairs was here specifically to talk about some of the difficult social issues that Franco brought to light. That committee was looking at the risks of suicide for Inuit youth, an issue that is really close to all our hearts, but not on our agenda tonight. I want you to know that we're all deeply concerned, and I hope we'll hear from more Inuit youth in our open mike session.

I'm going to turn my questioning to Mr. Anawak and Mr. Okalik as experienced politicians, federally and territorially. Not to turn your words against you, Mr. Okalik, because I wouldn't want to do that, but you said you go in with a clear mandate when you're a political party, and the Liberals did in this last election. Mr. Trudeau said very clearly that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post, and in this riding, my friend Mr. Tootoo represented the Liberals in the election and had 47% of the vote, and our friend Mr. Anawak represented the NDP with 26.5% of the vote, which means that of the voters who did turn out in Nunavut, 73.5% voted for parties and candidates whose commitment was that 2015 would be the last election held under first past the post.

That's why this committee has been established. We're here because we've been asked to determine what will replace first past the post. It's unusual in the course of our hearings across the country to hear so many people say they don't see anything wrong with it. That's important to hear, but I want to turn it back to you and say that this is our mandate. This was a commitment in the election. It happens to have also been a commitment from my party, the Green Party. If you add the Greens, across Canada 63% of voters voted for a party that had a commitment to provide a voting system that would ensure, one way or another, that the way Parliament was constituted after an election would reflect the way Canadians voted, so that 39% of the vote would result in 39% of the power, instead of 39% of the vote giving 100% of the power.

This is the context we're in here as a committee, and I wanted to turn it back to you. I'll start with Mr. Anawak and then Mr. Okalik. I don't want to put you on the spot, but given that we are changing our voting system, what would you like us to be mindful of? What matters to the people of Nunavut?

I'm hoping I have time to ask all four panellists. I'll start with the politicians in the middle and then work my way out to the edges.

Jack, would you like to jump in on that one first?

Mr. Jack Anawak: Thank you.

When you're talking about proportional representation, my fear would be that we don't have the population. In our case it would have to be a special dispensation of the electoral system to take us into account, because we don't have the population base but we have the area.

When you're looking at the whole issue of proportional representation, in order for us to support it, it would have to be made pretty clear that this is Nunavut and it's different from every other jurisdiction in Canada. There has to be that special dispensation for us.

• (1935)

Hon. Paul Okalik: *Qujannamiik.*

I have no strong views on the current system, but if it has to be changed, as I said, I would prefer the alternative model. You're given choices, but the ticket is multiple choices on a preference basis, so at least there will be a majority of wishes expressed through that model, which chooses the candidate on a priority basis. That would be my preferred model.

I have real concerns about proportional representation. As I said, I believe in unity. I believe in trying to make sure that our country remains united, and the proportional model could eventually fracture our country. I'd hate to see the results at the end of the day. Although all the parties would be part of the tent, at the same time it would create real challenges for our country.

Qujannamiik.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm not sure if I have time.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Okay.

How about you, Mr. Tootoo?

Mr. Victor Tootoo: I wasn't sure from your context whether that's why we're here or not, but I guess that's a debate you can have in the House.

If there's a change to the current system, I would encourage looking at a wider range of inclusivity in terms of demographics. It could be things like I mentioned earlier that Nunavut had considered prior to 1999, such as dual-gender ridings.

There's the question of the demographic in a riding. If there are, say, five candidates from one particular area who are going to be in the House, how many of those are age 16 to 25? How many are women? How many are minorities? If you're going to seriously look at a change to the electoral system to make it representative, then make it representative.

Mr. Franco Buscemi: The change I would like to see is not so much what system is—

I'm going to out my vote here. I, for one, ended up voting for a Liberal candidate, but I didn't vote for the Liberal Party. We can't make a blanket statement that every single person who voted for a Liberal candidate voted for electoral reform.

I believe low voter turnout is the issue. I don't think it's necessarily how we're electing people. I think, as Victor has alluded to several times, it's how we poll people. It's where we go to get the vote. We're wanting people to come to us, but I think it's becoming more and more clear that the polling stations need to be more accessible.

As for the change I would like to see in Nunavut, right now all the 300 parliamentary seats are divided by population, except for the three territories, which are guaranteed one seat, and I think that a new model needs to include how much land an MP is expected to represent, because that's a real barrier in the territories and not just in Nunavut.

• (1940)

The Chair: Thank you.

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

Mr. John Aldag: Thanks to each of our witnesses.

I'm finding this very interesting testimony. I'm sitting here listening and trying to compare.... I know there aren't comparisons between the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, but the three territories do have this unique challenge of large land bases and small populations.

What I've heard from many of you—or what I think I'm hearing—is that the existing system is working okay, yet in the other two locations, the other two territories, there was this question of proportional representation. It was felt that it was lacking, and that if somebody was being represented by a Liberal, you are going to have members of the territories who have voted for other parties and maybe don't see their voice represented.

Part of what I'm enjoying about this process is that it gives us a chance to look at different models. It doesn't have to be a straight first-past-the-post model or a straight proportional representation. We've been toying around with ideas. Is there a different model that we need to look at for the three territories in particular to try to give that sense of proportionality? Now, it may mean more seats, and I'm not sure that our government will go there, but I think this is the time to make those kinds of requests or to dream that dream.

Maybe I'll start with you, Mr. Tootoo. You made the comment you don't see the existing system as broken, yet if there were an opportunity to say maybe there's a way.... It could be the male-female dual-member ridings that we would come up with for the territories, or it could be that there's some sort of proportional piece. I just throw that out.

Is that worth looking at in terms of seeing if people could vote with the existing system, with maybe one seat for the three territories, or two seats, or three seats? Is there something we could do to meet some of these other needs? I don't know what that looks like. I just throw it out there for your thoughts, because what we're hearing is that people want to talk about what could be.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: Anything that allows women a better opportunity to be represented politically, I'm in favour of. I think the day of the old boys' club has come and gone. I think that a dual-gender riding and better representation for women in Nunavut would have been a great idea for us to start our territory with, and I'm sad that didn't happen.

Looking forward, I think that our decisions are better made by a collective that reflects what we look like and the discussion among us. Without that equal representation on a gender basis, we don't get those decisions.

Mr. John Aldag: Mr. Anawak, would you like to comment on this idea? I think it really is a question of what it might look like in Nunavut if there's an opportunity to try to give some sort of proportional flavour to our national system. How can we entertain that while respecting that perhaps the first-past-the-post system does work and does serve us well? If there were to be an add-on, what would that look like, in your opinion?

Mr. Jack Anawak: First of all, I think we're a very progressive territory. We've already had a woman premier, our current president of land claims for Nunavut is a woman, and our mayor is a woman, so I think we have a very progressive territory.

On the issue of proportional representation, my main concern would be that we don't get left out of the process because of our small population base. I really haven't thought about how a proportional representation system could transcend that. I would have to think about it some more. The last two MPs before the present one were women. At this point, I would be hard pressed to give you a detailed account of what should be.

● (1945)

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Richards.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

Mr. Buscemi, you made it clear in one of your previous responses that you believe in the argument some are making that because some of the parties add up to about 63% of the vote, if it were in their platform to change the voting system, this change would occur. You indicated in your response that a lot of people could have voted for those parties for other reasons.

In order to ensure that any changes being proposed are in line with the wishes of Canadians, what should this committee be doing or recommending?

Mr. Franco Buscemi: The number one issue I see in Nunavut is the land our MP has to cover. I think if we had an MP for each region in Nunavut, we would see the voter turnout rise significantly. It would bring the vote closer to home and allow the government to have more engagement with the territory. Trying to travel across the territory in one term is a challenge, if you want to engage with all your constituents. That's the number one change I would make.

Mr. Blake Richards: Would you say that's a principle we should be applying outside the territory? In other words, we don't want to be creating other ridings that are overly large and difficult to represent. Would that be an important principle to apply across the country?

Mr. Franco Buscemi: Yes. I believe the current practice is based on a population formula. I believe there's room to include the geographical masses of Canada. That's what we're known for, our great big country.

Mr. Blake Richards: Yes. I appreciate that.

Mr. Okalik, I'll ask a similar question. You indicated that you don't see any issues with the current system. You mentioned that if we were going to do something, you had an idea of what it should be. Based on that same argument, is there something the government should do as part of the process to help ensure that any changes we make are changes Canadians want to see?

Hon. Paul Okalik: I'm Liberal, and I voted Liberal, but they have already broken some promises to Inuit. They can break this promise easily, because they broke promises to Inuit already. This is one promise they can forget about, perhaps.

I have no real issues with the current system. If you have to look at a different model, I think the alternative model is the best one I could see working for my territory.

Mr. Blake Richards: Sure. If the recommendation is that the change is to be made—and obviously we wouldn't want to make a change lightly—and you believe that the system we have now has worked all right, do you think that's something we should put before the people? Should the people have a say, whether it be a referendum or some other way of putting it before the people to get their consent to change it, to make sure they want to go in that direction?

• (1950)

Hon. Paul Okalik: Most definitely. You're talking about potentially disenfranchising whole fractions of our nation, so I would insist on a vote for our country, because we're going to change it drastically if they choose to try and change it.

Mr. Blake Richards: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Richards.

We'll go to Ms. Romanado, please.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you so much. I would like to thank our four witnesses for being here this evening, and thank the members of the audience for being here as well. It's my first time in Iqaluit and I hope it's not my last time. I would like to thank our member of Parliament for Nunavut, Hunter Tootoo, for welcoming us today.

I take a lot of notes, so you probably see me typing extensively. I have a lot of questions because you've given us a wealth of information this evening. What is resonating with me, I think, is bringing me back to my university days and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. We talked about physiological and safety needs—just shelter, water, food, and safety—and it really resonated with me that we need to fix a lot in conjunction with our electoral system, in addition to fixing our electoral system.

We talked a little bit about representation and the difficulty candidates have in pursuing elections. We talked a little bit about the fact that candidates have to live off their savings in one of the most expensive ridings in the country. You have to travel throughout the campaign by air, so when we talk about possibly having 16-year-olds to 25-year-olds running for office, how many 16-year-olds to 25-year-olds have the kind of capital to be able to run for office? How many single family breadwinners are able to put away that kind of money to then run for office? Those are limitations, given the unique challenges you have here in the north.

Mr. Buscemi, you brought up an interesting fact. You said we should be thinking about the geography as well as the population. On our previous panel, Mr. Chambers brought up Sweden, and he talked about each square kilometre being worth 1.6 people and how that could be a formula that could be used in terms of calculating the representatives that could be given to folks who are living in vast regions.

I'd like to get your thoughts on that, because yes, we need to address our electoral system, but we have a lot to work on here in the north. Could you let me know what you think about that?

Mr. Franco Buscemi: A lot of Inuits will share, and I think we would be happy to share our 1.6 persons per square kilometre as well. I definitely think that's a huge barrier for us in having adequate

representation and adequate engagement. When we see the low voter turnout, that's a symptom of the lack of engagement, and it's not only with the voters in elections; it's also the engagement of elections with the people.

Again, Victor has brought up some great ideas that are being practised by other bodies, where they elect people with mobile polls. That is a very effective tool that they're using. Also, Mr. Okalik also brought up being able to elect our senator. I don't there are very many people who are satisfied with having a Senate. If you think he lives in Nunavut, then you need to check your facts again.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Okay. I won't comment.

That said, we talked a little bit about dual members. In 1997, I believe, you had the plebiscite to vote to have the two members, and you had a 39% turnout. I don't know why it was not repeated or whether, close to 20 years later, the issue ever came back as a possibility. I'm not sure if it did come back, but for something as fundamental as having equal representation in your legislative assembly, you couldn't get more than 40% of the population out to vote, and I think that had to do with a lack of information and so on and so forth. I didn't study the case extensively, but do you think it needs to be an issue of significant importance to the everyday lives of folks in Nunavut to get them to come out? Is it a one-off? How do we motivate folks to come out to address the issues we're bringing forward? The question of that 39% and why you didn't get the number out that needed to get out to vote is still hanging there.

Do you have some suggestions, Mr. Tootoo?

• (1955)

Mr. Victor Tootoo: You asked how many 16- to 25-year-olds can afford to run for an election. That assumes that 16- to 25-year-olds have exactly the same lifestyle as do 51-year-olds, and I don't think that's an accurate assumption. I just wanted to mention that.

There is the issue of dual-gender ridings. The 39% turnout in 1997 was pretty good compared to the turnouts for other elections in Nunavut, but yes, we didn't get 50% of the people to come out and vote on whether or not a dual-gender riding is a good idea.

When I think of a dual-gender riding, I think of a family and I think of how a family decision is made. I can speak only for my own personal example in my family. I have discussions with my wife about major things, and she has an equal say in what our family does. That's one of my own values. I'm not saying that everybody should think that way, but I am saying that I have personally seen that it makes for a better decision-making process. That's why I'm in support of advocating for better representation of women at a political level.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Alexandre Boulерice: I have a much better decision-making process: she decides, and then she tells me what the decision is.

Voices: Oh, oh!

• (2000)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It was a joke.

First of all, thank you very much for having us here. This is my first visit to Nunavut and Iqaluit. I learned a lot today.

Mr. Buscemi, thank you very much for your very sincere, very touching and very relevant presentation. I will remember it a long time.

You will understand why it is good for a kid from Montreal like me to get out and come to a place like this. I did some comparisons. My riding is five times smaller than the city of Iqaluit, but it has 22 times more inhabitants. And so I live in a completely different universe. I use my bike to go to meetings in my riding.

We are tackling a serious problem here, the representativeness of our electoral system. I carried out my own little research project for comparative purposes. You have before you 12 federal members, and only two of them obtained the majority of the votes in their riding. This was—to give credit where credit is due—Mr. Scarpaleggia, and Ms. May.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: And I was another.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Oh, was that the case? Then there were three.

Several others almost got there. Mr. DeCoursey was very close. Mr. Richards was another. Nevertheless, this is quite representative of what happened during the last election.

We have been saying all along that it is important that we increase electoral participation and that people have to get out and vote. But their vote has to mean something. In the majority of cases, half of the votes did not elect any member. If we increase voter turnout but people see that their voice is not represented in Parliament, we won't have solved the problem, in my opinion.

In the last election, nine million votes went to elect members, and nine million votes were lost. What I like about more proportional systems is that even if a person did not vote for the candidate who was elected locally, their vote will still find a voice and be represented in the federal Parliament.

In vast territories like yours, the challenge is to find a way to increase proportionality with only one member. That is difficult.

My question is addressed to the four witnesses.

Would you be open to the possibility of adding a member for Nunavut, or a member for each of the three large northern regions? Each territory would have its local member, and others would be added to represent the three large ridings of Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut.

[*English*]

Mr. Franco Buscemi: Thank you.

I think that this community probably feels the pressure that perhaps our MP feels, in that right now you're attacking a single problem, a single issue, that was brought up in the election for the whole country. That's a lot of land, and there's a lot of consideration.

If I understood you correctly about the three regions being the three territories, I don't think it would be very good to put that potential onus on people from Nunavut. I do not want the onus on me of having someone else represent another region, and I would hope that our neighbours in NWT and Yukon also feel that they don't feel adequately informed to select who should represent us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Do you have any comments to add?

[*English*]

Hon. Paul Okalik: The reason we created Nunavut was to focus on our territory and our unique culture. I think having one MP representing all three territories would not be seen favourably by our territory.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: I was referring to three local members, plus one other.

[*English*]

Hon. Paul Okalik: I know. It was adding one more, to have one additional member—

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: It would not be welcomed.

Hon. Paul Okalik: It would not be much progress, because we created Nunavut to focus on our priorities, and one additional MP for the whole north would defeat that.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Mr. Nater, you now have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to our panellists for an excellent discussion so far.

I'm going to jump around on a couple of different issues, and I'll see where I'll get.

I want to start with Mr. Okalik and talk a bit more about the consensus style of government here and the challenges you mentioned about accountability. I want to talk about the mid-term review, but I want to bring it back to electoral accountability.

Can you bring us a few insights into how campaigns unfold at the constituency level? How does an incumbent campaign when they have very little they can overtly promise? Does it become a mushy middle-type thing, where very little is promised and it's more based on personality? How does something unfold if you're boxed in at the constituency level?

Hon. Paul Okalik: The challenge with our current system is that you can promise the moon, and then you can get elected and get the one term. The way I run my campaigns is that I look at the territory. Fortunately, I have a very good riding that reflects our territory and the populace. I work on what issues they're facing, and it works well with the rest of the territory. It's been working for me. I'm on my fourth term as the member for Iqaluit.

It's a very challenging way of governance, because you can't really promise things, other than what you can work out with your colleagues maybe someday. It's trying to focus on what might work for the territory and then working with my colleagues in the assembly afterwards to try to make it happen and reflect the mandate that is produced at the end.

● (2005)

Mr. John Nater: Both you and Mr. Tootoo have mentioned the challenge of the timing of elections. At the federal level, we do have a fixed elections act. It may not be as strong as some would like it to be. Is that a small step that ought to be taken at the federal level, and potentially the territorial levels as well, so that an Elections Act date is fixed that is more attuned to the weather, the climate, and the hunting patterns here in the north? Would that be kind of...?

Hon. Paul Okalik: Very much so. We need to change our act, as well, to set a fixed date to reflect our cultural practices. It's fixed for four years, and whatever works for the entire country is something that... I believe it's the third Monday of October in the current federal system, so there's no real issue there, but as you know in governing, if you fall, the election can be called at any time. The concern I have with mandatory requirements is that the election can fall in the middle of our hunting season or in the middle of something rather important for our family, so making it mandatory would be difficult for us in that way.

Mr. John Nater: Extending from that, would a longer voting period be beneficial as well, or is it...?

Hon. Paul Okalik: I don't know about you, but I think the longer it is, the more tension it creates, particularly in our own little territory. The current time required is workable, and if it is longer, it creates...we get tired of voting issues sometimes, too.

I went to Hillary's campaign just a few days ago, and that was fun, but it gets tiring.

Mr. John Nater: Absolutely. An 11-week campaign gets exceptionally tiring sometimes. I can only imagine with the travel in the north how Mr. Tootoo and others experienced that campaign as well.

Is there any time left, sir?

The Chair: You have a minute.

Mr. John Nater: Okay, perfect.

I want to go very quickly to Mr. Buscemi. You mentioned in your opening comments that you thought there ought to be three senators from Nunavut and that corresponding to the Senate floor, there also ought to be three MPs. I want to follow up on that very briefly. Would you have each of the senators and MPs corresponding to specific geographic regions?

Mr. Franco Buscemi: Yes, that's correct.

Mr. John Nater: Across the panel—you can answer yes or no—is there unanimity that senators ought to be elected in the north. Is there consensus?

Mr. Franco Buscemi: Yes.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: I think the unanimous thing is that senators ought to be from Nunavut.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. DeCoursey is next.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much.

Thank you to everyone for being here this evening. To our four presenters, I don't want to take too much time, as the Blue Jays' game starts very shortly.

Mr. Tootoo, you and others talked about the problem with voter turnout. As we've learned, it's a problem. Countries all over the western world are experiencing declines in voter turnout. We've talked about the myriad reasons that some elections see a decrease in voter turnout. We did see a spike in this last election, including here in Nunavut.

Mr. Tootoo, you presented one idea on reform that could possibly enhance voter participation, and we haven't talked about that. It's the way ballots are designed. Do you want to take some time to expand a little further on what the challenge is now and what possible reform or improvement options might be there?

Mr. Victor Tootoo: It's the whole idea around ballot design and voting equipment.

The way it works here and across our country is that you go to the polling station. You have a ballot. It has three, four, five, six, eight choices for individuals to elect. You take your pen or your pencil and you make your mark beside the person you want to elect. You give it not to the scrutineers, but rather to the Elections Canada employees. It goes into the ballot box.

Having mobile polls makes it much easier for people with disabilities to vote. It makes it easier for unilingual Inuktitut-speaking people to vote. They are getting the ballots themselves, so it is simple and easy.

When people look at a ballot, not everybody sees the same thing. People have dyslexia. There are all kinds of learning issues. You could look at this and see something different from what somebody else sees. As an example, Jack wrote his name in Inuktitut on his name card. When an Inuktitut-speaking person sees it, that might mean something completely different from what he meant to write. Some form of ensuring that the voter is informed on exactly who they are and what their choices on a ballot are....

I don't know what the answer to that is. My main point about the types of changes to make is in getting the polls out to the people—

● (2010)

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Right.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: —and access to that vote. Access to voting is a difficult thing in Nunavut.

Hon. Paul Okalik: Can I add something?

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Absolutely.

Hon. Paul Okalik: The other thing that we encounter sometimes at the ballot box is some are illiterate. We got around that in our first election, I believe, when we had pictures of the candidates on the ballot itself. In one of the elections I ran in where there were no pictures produced, a voter drew a rabbit, which is my last name. Instead of marking an "X", the voter drew my last name.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: I hope the scrutineer fought for that ballot.

Hon. Paul Okalik: It was spoiled, but those are the challenges that we face. We have to try to get around those barriers that people face and allow everybody to vote, whether they are illiterate or literate, in any language that may be reflected in the territory.

Qujannamiik.

Mr. Matt DeCoursey: Thank you very much for that testimony.

With the short time remaining, can you talk to the challenge in trying to introduce proportionality in a region such as Nunavut, where I'm sensing a distinct desire to retain the element of local representation? Are you then suggesting it may be okay to introduce proportionality in some areas of the country, and perhaps move to the ranked ballot or the alternative vote in a place like Nunavut? I heard this quite clearly, and earlier today as well. Perhaps other large geographic regions of the territories would see that as a nice incremental step as well to allow for more consensus around who the selected candidate is.

Hon. Paul Okalik: Yes, we have neighbours in Greenland who have proportional representation, and it can create instability in a small area. That's my great concern. I prefer the alternative vote model, in that it creates stability. The majority of voters express a will with regard to that individual, and whether it be a first choice or a second choice, they're chosen. We have to get past the current practice.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tootoo, would you like to say something?

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for coming. I guess you've figured out what we from the Nunavut area all know, because you saved the best for last in your visit.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you for coming to Iqaluit.

I guess there's just one question. I know that what I've heard from just about everyone today is that whatever changes are made to our electoral system, we all feel that Nunavut and any jurisdiction with a large area and a small population shouldn't be penalized for it. This needs to take into account the geographics of it, and the three territories, for example, should not lose out on anything through any changes that are made. If anything, they should be strengthened, given this government's commitment to a new relationship with the first people of this country.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Buscemi.

● (2015)

Mr. Franco Buscemi: I definitely think there's a calculation that can be done. There are a lot smart people in this room and then there are a lot of smart people connected to everyone in this room. Whether it's increasing the number of people each MP represents to reduce the number of seats so that you can increase the number of each representing larger land masses.... I mean, with St. John's, Newfoundland, do we need two different MPs, or can there be one MP who can still adequately represent the city, freeing up a seat for, let's say, Labrador, for example? The entire Labrador region has one seat and also a huge land mass. I definitely think that you can adjust the numbers so we have better representation for all Canadians.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Okalik.

Hon. Paul Okalik: I'm a lawyer. I study law, so I can't really push for something that might be going against charter rights. I understand that there are limitations in our current system that we can't do much about. The current system of senatorial elections is something that we can do something about, I believe. That would be one way of getting more representation for our territory. The current practice, as I said, is workable.

Qujannamiik.

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Anawak.

Mr. Jack Anawak: Thank you.

I just want to add to what has been said earlier. The issue of proportional representation is a problem unless there's a special dispensation.

You have to go back to the 1970s. We were part of the Northwest Territories until 1999, but we were always at the losing end in the eastern part of Northwest Territories as Innu, as one group of people—one group—because there were fewer people in the eastern Arctic than there were in the western part of the Northwest Territories. That's why we went through the process of negotiating the land claims. There was also a special discussion on the issue that the Northwest Territories be split into two, as you know.

That is why we fought hard to get our own territory. It would be a setback if we got into a situation in which there was no special dispensation.

Let's say that proportional representation is introduced. It would be a setback for us, for something we fought so hard for, to just suddenly lose this, unless we were given that special dispensation.

Mr. Victor Tootoo: Should Nunavut suffer as a result of any changes? The obvious answer is no. If there are changes to our fundamental system of elections, I think what you have heard from all of us here tonight is that no, Nunavut should not have less representation at the federal level. Perhaps we should see more.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice: Mr. Chair, if I can take 10 seconds for the record, I want to outline that Blake Richards was right; he was elected by way more than 50% of his electors.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: I got 51% but he's my colleague and gets to remember this.

• (2020)

The Chair: The whole theory goes down the drain there, Mr. Boulterice.

Ms. Elizabeth May: That makes about everyone here, except Alexandre.

The Chair: This has been a really interesting panel. Not only did you give us the opportunity to learn so much about the political culture in Nunavut, but in some way you held up our current parliamentary system and allowed us to see it in different circumstances, because you have the Westminster model but you operate differently, without parties. I find that very instructive, and from that point of view, among others, the testimony is very valuable.

We're going to break for about 30 seconds because we're going to go to our open-mike session, but first I would just like to thank all the people who assisted us in organizing this meeting today, notably Madeleine Redfern, who could not be with us today; Senator Patterson; public servant Vyann Andersen-Goudie and Becky Kilabuk; MP Tootoo and his staff; and our extraordinary committee staff and the interpreters. They're a bit shy back there; they don't want any attention. I also want to thank the excellent committee staff who worked so hard to make this a day to remember.

We're going to break for about 30 seconds while the mikes get set up. Thank you again. It's a pleasure meeting you all and learning of your experiences and insight.

• (2020)

_____ (Pause) _____

• (2020)

The Chair: We'll proceed to the open-mike session. We have four people on the list, with Peter Williamson to start. We'll have Mr. Williamson for two minutes at mike number one and Thomas Ahlfors at mike number two.

• (2025)

Mr. Peter Williamson (As an Individual): Hi. I'm Peter Williamson. I'm here as an individual.

I was here this afternoon and I found the presentation made by NTI really interesting. I thought the questions from the members of the committee were really good, so I want to speak to those a bit.

Just to back up first, though, there was also discussion around what Nunavut meant to the presenters. For me, I remember back in the late 1980s or early 1990s when the CBC announced that the federal government had withdrawn article 4 of the Nunavut Land Claims Agreement, which was the commitment to establish Nunavut. I remember being very surprised at the withdrawal of that article.

The Tunngavik Federation of Nunavut, the predecessor to NTI, said, "If you're going to withdraw article 4, there's not going to be a vote to ratify the agreement", so it really wasn't because of the goodwill of the Government of Canada that we have Nunavut. It really was because of the determination of Inuit to establish the Nunavut territory and government. For me, that's very important.

When I listened to NTI's presentation this afternoon, what really stuck out for me was that they thought that Inuit in Nunavut should

have a member of Parliament elected to represent the Inuit of Nunavut and, to me, that makes a lot of sense. Some of the members had questions around that idea, and I'd like to address those.

One of the questions was, if you have a member of Parliament from Nunavut representing Inuit, what about the Inuit in the other regions? Would that MP be able to represent them as well?

There was another question about section 35 of the charter, regarding first nations, Inuit, and Métis. What it meant to me was what kind of justification can there be to elect an Inuit person from Nunavut that would accommodate some of the concerns that people might have around that?

For me, there are bigger questions at issue here. If we need to come up with some justification for Nunavut and there are questions around making sure that Inuit in other regions are represented and making sure that it's not just Inuit but also first nations and Métis who are represented, then that is an issue. In each of the jurisdictions and territories in Canada, aboriginal people face issues too, and it shouldn't just be the Inuit of Nunavut who have somebody to represent their issues.

I think taking a broader look at the issues that aboriginal people face in each province and territory and making sure that they have a voice is very important. I'll just use one example.

One of the policy issues that Canada has when it comes to land claims negotiation is occupancy. Under the comprehensive land claims policy, each aboriginal group that wants to negotiate a land claims agreement has to prove that it was there first. It has to be able to say, "We were here first. This is the land we occupied and this is when we occupied it." It's not just Inuit but all of the aboriginal peoples in Canada who have to prove that. They were here first—we all know that—and still they have to prove that.

These are the kinds of issues that I think are important to aboriginal people. Being able to elect somebody from the province or territory that they are in would give them a voice in the Parliament of Canada, where they could address these issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

Aaron Watson, please come up to mike number one.

Go ahead, please, Mr. Ahlfors.

• (2030)

Mr. Thomas Ahlfors (As an Individual): Thank you for having me here.

Unlike pretty much everyone you've heard since your dinner break, I'm not actually from here. I've been a resident of Nunavut for the last four years and a citizen of Canada for the last three years. Since then, I've voted in the federal election, the territorial election, and the municipal election.

One thing that living in Nunavut has shown me is that it is a unique place, so Nunavut's voice needs to be saved. The only way to really do that is to make sure that we have representation in Parliament that the people of Nunavut have voted on. Proportional representation, whether it happens elsewhere in the country or not, cannot affect our having a voice in Parliament. We need at least one representative—if not more, as you've heard—who are voted for by only the people of Nunavut.

On top of that, I think it needs to be protected. What happened in the last election was that Nunavut—the fastest-growing jurisdiction in Canada—went from having one voice in 308 to one voice in 338. That's a loss of 10% of our voice. We can't have that reduction happen again. If you're looking at expanding the size of Parliament to accommodate proportional representation, you need to first guarantee that Nunavut has a seat that the Nunavummiut voted for. Second, if you're going to increase the size of Parliament, there needs to be at least one Nunavut resident who is part of that, so we do not lose our one out of 338.

In addition, when I voted in the last election, as Ms. May said, I voted for a change in the voting system. However, I didn't vote for proportional representation; I voted to get rid of the first-past-the-post system. The reason was that I wanted to make sure that whoever represents my riding has the support of at least 50% of the people in the riding, and not 38% or 47% or whatever number. It should be 50%.

There should be some kind of system—an alternate vote, a runoff, or whatever—to make sure we get to that 50% representation in the riding. If we go to some other system and have proportional representation, it should be on top of that, not replacing that.

Finally, you're here in Nunavut. You've come to Iqaluit to consult with Nunavummiut. Honestly, that's like showing up in downtown Toronto or downtown Montreal and saying that you consulted with Ontario or Quebec. You haven't consulted with Nunavut; you've consulted with Iqaluit. I can understand, because it's very difficult to get around, as we've heard, but at least some of the smaller communities should have been visited by one or two of you to really hear Nunavut's voice.

Thank you.

The Chair: Would Ms. Maatalii Aneraq Okalik come to mike number two?

Go ahead, Mr. Watson.

Mr. Aaron Watson (As an Individual): Hello, and welcome to Iqaluit. It's nice to see you here.

Recently I had the privilege of meeting privately with Minister Monsef and I wanted to share a little of what we spoke of that day.

To offer a little insight on electoral reform in Nunavut, I'm certain that the truly partisan members of federal parties would hold a strong opinion. By the way, I'm the president of the Nunavut New Democratic Party.

Many wouldn't like reform because we might end up being less represented federally than we already are. Other people who are members of certain parties, who work here but aren't planning to retire here, may or may not fully support electoral reform. This is

true because party members generally follow their parties no matter what. Those who aren't local or are going to retire in the south may not be in touch with or care about the concerns of Inuit and lifelong residents of Nunavut regarding political matters. The concern of having less representation federally may be of little consequence to them.

Nunavut and many of its people may appear unmoved on the issue of electoral reform unless there are provisions to give us more representation at the federal level. We are a territory, a province-in-waiting. We should have at least two MPs in this vast territory that is the key to Canada's Arctic sovereignty.

Since we do not have the population to back up the addition of another MP, I will give reasons why we should. Nunavut is the largest riding in the territory, a province-in-waiting; Nunavut has and patrols the largest coast in Canada; we are resource-rich, and development has just begun; we have the largest self-determining indigenous government in Canada; we have the second-largest land claim in the world; and we are the fastest-growing population in Canada.

Thank you. *Qujannamiik.*

● (2035)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Next we have Ms. Aneraq Okalik.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik (President, National Inuit Youth Council): *Unukut.* Good evening.

Qujannamiik. Thank you for the opportunity to address your standing committee.

Honourable chair and all the members around the table, *tunngasugi.* Welcome to Nunavut.

My remarks may be more than two minutes, so I ask for unanimous consent in advance to be able to complete my remarks, honourable chair.

The Chair: You may go ahead.

Ms. Maatalii Okalik: *Qujannamiik.* Thank you very much.

My name is Maatalii Aneraq Okalik, and I sit, as Elizabeth May has indicated, as the president of the National Inuit Youth Council within Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, so I represent Inuit youth across Canada.

I have the opportunity now to share a bit about who Inuit youth are and what their priorities are in relation to your standing committee as you review electoral reform.

As you are aware, there are 60,000 Inuit who live across Canada, and the majority of our population is made up of Inuit youth. It's very different from the realities of the southern Canadian population.

We are situated across four Inuit regions, and that is reflected in four provinces and territories. Definitely, representation is one of the highest issues with respect to elections and federal representation.

As Elizabeth May indicated, I testified before some of your counterparts on the standing committee on aboriginal affairs, specifically on suicide prevention, and at that time, I indicated the social inequities that Inuit face in Canada. I think that as we address the question on electoral reform, these inequities should be taken into consideration.

Inuit Canadians do not have the same quality of life as the majority of our fellow citizens: 39% of Inuit and Inuit Nunangat live in crowded homes, versus 4% of all Canadians; 29% of Inuit aged 25 to 64 successfully complete a high school diploma, versus 85% of all Canadians; 70% of Inuit households in Nunavut alone do not have enough food to eat, versus 8.3% of all Canadian households. The number of positions per 100,000 people in Nunavut is 30 in terms of access, versus 119 in urban health authorities across Canada, and 70.8 years is the average life expectancy for Inuit, versus 80.6 years for all Canadians.

Not only are we dying younger due to the aforementioned social inequities, but the leading cause of death is suicide. Across regions, we have a five to 25 times higher rate than the rest of Canada.

These are really important social inequities that we face on a daily basis. They have implications on our day-to-day lives, our quality of life, and they have a significant impact on how we are engaging in elections and how we're engaging with the federal government as a whole.

Compared to other jurisdictions with representation in the House of Commons or in the Senate, we are not represented accordingly. In relation to the Nunavut legislature, a lot of you, I noted, had a number of questions with respect to how the consensus-style government works, as well as representation. We are aware that there are 26 communities in Nunavut, with 22 representatives. Some of the communities that we have in Nunavut are multi-constituency communities by virtue of the unique needs and realities within smaller communities compared to some of your respective ridings.

There are 30 standing committees in the House of Commons alone, in contrast to those that sit in the Senate. When you have one MP for a region that is facing a number of social inequities that would be discussed on the standing committees, how are we to ensure that the basic needs of the population, who are supposed to be represented as equal Canadians, are being addressed effectively and are reflective of our realities and our culture?

When you make formal recommendations to the House, as well as ensuring accountability in spending, legislation, and issues related to departments and their respective mandates, how are we being represented when we have one MP trying to sit on all 30 of these committees when faced with these issues on a daily basis?

I sit on the board of directors for an Inuit organization and I lead the youth contingent. Inuit organizations like this one are required to work and lobby with a number of the departments that you work with through your standing committee to deal with these social inequities and the lack of an Inuit-to-crown relationship. In order to attack some of these issues, we need more representation.

● (2040)

A lot of you have indicated interest in the youth perspective on voting. In my position, I had the experience of helping create awareness and excitement about the last federal election, and I'd like to share some of my findings with you.

As a volunteer president with a day job working with the National Inuit Youth Council, I felt the responsibility to create basic awareness among Inuit youth, as Canadians, about the process of voting. They need to be aware of the way in which they can vote by having identification, as well as the locations where they have to show up in person to vote if they are students. Nunavut and the other Inuit regions don't have a university setting in southern Canada where they can vote outside their constituency and know that their voice is being heard. Actually, that's not my responsibility.

Inuit youth don't necessarily see themselves reflected in the materials that are being disseminated. Some of our regions have legislation in place, because we have the Inuit language here in Canada. We have official languages acts, as well as protection acts, but when the material reflective of that reality isn't being disseminated, Inuit youth don't see themselves in the process and don't have the appropriate information to be able to make their vote count. However, because of the composition of our population, Inuit youth can essentially decide the vote.

People are able to vote by going to an Elections Canada office. Are there many offices in our 53 communities in Canada? How many Service Canada offices are available for individuals to be able to attain the identification required to exercise their suffrage?

I made a call on behalf of an Inuit youth interested in attaining a social insurance number in order to get a passport. This was in Pangnirtung. This youth was told to go to the Gatineau office. That's a \$3,000 cost for airfare, which is not an essential service in Canada. Our communities are fly-in only, and it's a two-day trek.

When only 1% of the Canadian population has been to our homeland and the issues that we're facing on a daily basis are not reflected in the House of Commons, I worry that the social inequities we face in this developed country will not be addressed accordingly.

Qujannamiik. Thank you very much for affording me the time to share my reflections.

The Chair: Thank you.

Is there anyone else who would like to say something?

Okay. Go ahead.

Hon. Hunter Tootoo: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks again to everyone for coming here.

What you've heard this afternoon and tonight are a lot of the same things that Maatalii pointed out and that the indigenous affairs committee heard when they were here. It's true and it's recognized here that it's hard for Inuit to move forward. Basically, we're living in third world conditions. You have to have your basic needs met in order to move on.

As one of the guys asked, "What's more important: what I am going to eat, whether I am going to be safe, where I am going to sleep, or electoral reform and the date of the next election?"

Look at the idea of proportional representation. I think it was pointed out that no one from here is too supportive of that idea. If you look at the way funding has been doled out in the past, you'll see that it's on a per capita basis.

We have such a huge infrastructure deficit. We're very far behind as a result of that already. Per capita funding is something you can look at to see how it has affected us here. It would basically end up being the same in the electoral system.

From what I know in my previous capacity as a member of the Legislative Assembly, there were a couple of electoral reform and electoral boundaries committees struck to look at that. It may be a suggestion for your research staff to contact the Legislative

Assembly to get those reports, as well as some previous amendments that speak to our Elections Act.

The goal of any election is 100% turnout. I think in my first one I had 101% turnout. That's when they had those old outdated lists that nobody wanted to go on.

There's been some really good stuff here. If you're able to get hold of someone at the Legislative Assembly, that could be helpful to you, especially given the unique challenges that we face here. That should be helpful to you in looking at some modifications to try, such as mobile polls. It might make it a little bit easier for you.

I'd like to thank everyone for coming and participating.

● (2045)

The Chair: It's been a great day. That's an understatement.

Thank you, everyone.

That wraps up our cross-Canada tour. We're back to Ottawa for a few more hearings, and then comes the challenge of writing a consensus report.

The meeting is adjourned.

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