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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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Thursday, March 30, 2023

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 60 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

The committee is meeting today to continue its study of the Report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec.

In the first hour, we will be hearing from Mr. Stéphane Bergeron, MP, Montarville, Claude DeBellefeuille, MP, Salaberry—Suroît, Jean-Denis Garon, MP, Mirabel.

You will each have four minutes for an opening statement after which will proceed to questions from the Committee.

Mr. Bergeron, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Montarville, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good morning, dear colleagues.

At the time of the last review of the federal electoral map, I was a member of the Quebec National Assembly. The former Mayor of Sainte-Julie had told me at the time that apart from the fact that she did not feel included in this new riding, that she wanted nothing to do with the name "Montarville".

My request is therefore not an opposition per se to the report of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec, but rather a proposal to change the name of the riding of Montarville so that it better reflects its constituent communities and residents.

In terms of its toponymy, the name "Montarville" primarily refers to a former seigneurie and, more precisely, to the city of Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville, meaning it covers only part of the riding. While "Montarville" is quite appropriate for the name of the provincial electoral district given its constituent municipalities and the fact that Boucherville (which is not part of the federal electoral district) and Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville are crossed and connected by Montarville Boulevard/Street, this name does, however, seem much less appropriate for the federal riding.

I believe the federal riding could have a name that is more inclusive for its constituent localities and residents, especially considering that the commission's proposed amendments include adding a significant part of the City of Carignan, which did not support this transfer to the federal riding of Montarville.

Mont Saint-Bruno is the one geographic feature shared by Saint-Basile-le-Grand, Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville and Sainte-Julie, the three municipalities in the federal riding. This landmark can easily be seen throughout the new federal riding.

Standing high above the Montérégie, Mont Saint-Bruno is a distinctive feature of the riding's landscape. It is home to Mont-Saint-Bruno National Park, the busiest of all of Quebec's national parks, and backs onto a popular ski resort. It is therefore widely known far beyond the boundaries of the federal riding.

I believe that a name change is essential to create a sense of belonging that can be shared by all of the riding's residents, especially in light of the commission's proposed changes. I also believe that it would be appropriate to add the name "L'Acadie" to "Mont-Saint-Bruno" to acknowledge the citizens of the City of Carignan who will be incorporated into the federal riding currently known as Montarville.

The L'Acadie River runs through the City of Carignan and part of the City of Saint-Basile-le-Grand. Moreover, the name "L'Acadie" refers to the historic region of Canada whose sons and daughters, following the Acadian Deportation, played an important role in developing the region of Quebec now known as the Montérégie

For the aforementioned reasons, I propose that the federal riding of Montarville, as amended in the proposal of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec, be named the riding of "Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie" (or "L'Acadie—Mont-Saint-Bruno"). This new name would have the added benefit of differentiating the federal riding from the provincial riding, which has substantially different boundaries

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1155)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

We will now continue with Ms. DeBellefeuille.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Salaberry—Suroît, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for hearing the various opinions that are against the changes proposed by the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec.

I took part in the public consultation held in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield on October 3, 2022. The members of the commission heard the views of nine participants.

To put things in context, in the initial proposal published last summer, the current riding of Salaberry—Suroît would undergo two significant changes.

First, the riding's boundaries would be substantially changed. At the eastern boundary of my riding, seven municipalities would be moved to the future riding of Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville. The western boundary would add two municipalities. There was also a proposed name change for the riding, from Salaberry—Suroît to Salaberry—Suroît—Soulanges.

Further to my discussions with a number of mayors, the regional county municipalities, or RCMs, and the community development corporations affected by the boundary changes, the proposal, while not unanimous, was close to consensus.

There was some opposition from the community of Pointe-des-Cascades. Their current MP, although aware of their argument and unhappy with the commission's decision, did not file an objection today.

In short, I feel that the boundaries of the riding are acceptable. What I am opposed to is the suggested name for the riding. As I mentioned, the initial proposal was to name it Salaberry—Suroît—Soulanges.

The addition of Soulanges to the name of the riding I represent, and in particular the removal of Soulanges from the future riding of Vaudreuil, was welcomed by everyone. That amounted to correcting a mistake made by the commission in 2012, because much of the Soulanges area is in Salaberry—Suroît. So every now and then, electoral boundaries commissions can get it wrong.

However, in the commission's recent report, there is a name change once again. The new proposed name is Beauharnois—Soulanges. In other words, Salaberry—Suroît would become Beauharnois—Soulanges. It's a complete change, a major one, which was nevertheless not submitted for public consultation.

Concretely, Salaberry—Suroît disappears completely, leaving only Beauharnois—Soulanges. I respectfully point out that the commission did not give due consideration to the comments made by citizens at the public consultation. My view is that the consensus would be to retain the name Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon, because Beauharnois, Soulanges and Huntingdon are the names of my colleagues' ridings in the National Assembly of Quebec. It would make things clearer for the residents.

The name "Salaberry" is also important because it refers to Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, the largest city within the proposed new riding.

I also gave the clerk letters of support from the reeve of the Haut-Saint-Laurent RCM and the mayor of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, both of whom also requested the same change to the future federal riding.

Furthermore, I approached the Grand Chief of the Akwesasne Mohawk community, the Quebec sector of which I proudly represent, and he did not indicate an interest in adding an indigenous term to the name of our riding.

I'd like to conclude by giving my full support to the MPs from eastern Quebec who came here to testify last week, because the commission is still proposing to do away with Avignon—La Métis—Matane—Matapédia. The stance taken on this by eastern Quebec MPs is eloquent, and they are fully justified in opposing this change.

You are aware, Madam Chair, of the fact that I represent one of the most populous ridings in Quebec. Nevertheless, I agree with the request from the municipalities in this region, the local RCMs, the elected members of the Quebec National Assembly, and of course the four federal MPs from eastern Quebec.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

The floor is yours, Mr. Garon.

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon (Mirabel, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Esteemed colleagues, thank you for having me today.

In the first version of the electoral boundaries map proposed by the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec, the City of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines remained entirely in the Mirabel riding. Afterwards, following various consultations, there was a second version of the electoral boundaries map in which, to our great surprise, the municipality of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines was completely splintered from the City of Mirabel.

I can tell you that this new version of the map was very poorly received in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, in particular because there were no consultations with the people of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines.

As you will see, the mayor of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, the provincial member for Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, and much of the population of Mirabel, who are clearly not of my political stripe, supported my request to return Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines to the Mirabel riding. Otherwise, an important community of interest is being splintered. It's important to understand that what's being done is taking Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and putting it in the riding of Rivière-du-Nord.

To begin with, Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines represent a community of interest in the Lower Laurentians economic region, which does not include the municipalities of La Rivière-du-Nord. Mirabel and the neighbouring RCMs in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines conduct many projects together, including economic projects. Tourisme Basses-Laurentides, which promotes our area, serves both Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines.

ABL Immigration, a key organization whose mission is to promote and support the cultural and workforce integration of refugees and immigrants, serves Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and Mirabel, but not the municipalities of La Rivière-du-Nord.

There is also the matter of media ownership. The local newspapers that report on all community activity, including *L'Éveil*, *Infos Mirabel* and *Nord Info* have journalists covering events in the municipalities of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and Mirabel, but none of them cover the municipalities of La Rivière-du-Nord.

The Mille-Îles school service centre, which socializes our children, and provides elementary, secondary and professional education, serves Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, but not the municipalities in the riding of Rivière-du-Nord. The Agricultural Training Centre in Sainte-Scholastique, in Mirabel, offers training courses for young farmers in the farming community of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines.

There is also the issue of expropriations. As you know, there were major expropriations in Mirabel in the 1960s and 1970s. These expropriations are even today causing concern in terms of land use planning, urban development, airport safety and security, and the agricultural sector. These expropriations were in Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines. It is therefore essential to have an integrated riding where the MP is familiar with these issues, which is clearly the case for me.

There is a strong sense of attachment between Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, and communities of interest ought not to be splintered on the basis of columns of numbers. Keeping Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines in Mirabel would change absolutely nothing, or almost nothing, in the electoral quotient. We're talking about a variation of approximately 2%.

There is also the matter of demographic growth. Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines has a municipal bylaw that restricts and sets a ceiling on demographic growth, because the intent is to keep it as a farming city. It's very obvious that there were no consultations and that a community of interest is being split. It's very clear that the community of interest at issue is very unhappy about the news.

Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines is tired of continually changing from one riding to another. It was in the riding of Terrebonne—Blainville for 10 years, and then became part of the riding of Mirabel. It has now been shifted to the Rivière-du-Nord riding, and given the demographic growth of the cities in that riding, it might be shifted to yet another one in 10 years. It needs stability. When you have a community of interest, it's important to be careful and to ensure that the ties that have been established can remain strong. That's exactly the opposite of what has been done by the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission.

• (1200)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Are we ready to continue? We don't have much time.

I appreciate your comments, but we need to continue with our meeting.

We are going to begin the six-minute rounds of questions. We'll begin with Mr. Gourde, who will be followed by Mr. Fergus, Mr. Therrien, and Ms. Blaney.

I'd like to remind you to speak slowly so that the interpreters can do their work. If there's a problem with that, I'll ask the interpreters to raise a hand, and we can remind people to speak a little more slowly.

Mr. Gourde, You have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lévis—Lotbinière, CPC):** Thank you, Madam chair.

My question is for Mr. Garon.

Mr. Garon, you said that it wouldn't make much of a change in the electoral quotient in the riding, because the change would be approximately 2%. That, I would say, is 2,000 to 2,200 people. However the domino effect means that you would be taking that away from the other riding.

Would your proposal make it possible to achieve equality in terms of the redrawing of the electoral map, or would one of the other of ridings be affected negatively?

• (1205)

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** If you look at the documents I provided, you'll see that I have the support of the MP for Rivière-du-Nord, who agrees with our arguments about the community of interests. The 2% that I mentioned falls in the middle of the acceptable range for change, which does not lead to a domino effect. There is no problem in returning the City of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines to the riding of Mirabel.

We are on the second North Shore in the Montreal region. These are rather populous ridings. A small part of the riding was previously taken away, which made a lot of sense, but there would not be a domino effect if the commission decided to accede to my request.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** In the current proposal, would the electoral quotient of the municipality also change by 2%?

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** The electoral quotient would remain the same.

The ridings in the region are fairly well balanced. When we talk about a variation of 2% for the electoral quotient, it's for the ridings of Mirabel and Rivière-du-Nord. That's why I can say that the return of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines to the riding of Mirabel would have a negligible impact on the electoral quotient.

If the commission were to accede to my request, that would also be true for demographic growth. Over the past few years, there has been increased growth in Saint-Jérôme and Sainte-Julie, which are in the riding of Rivière-du-Nord. Urban development is not as heavy in this riding. It would probably make more sense for the next 10 years to keep Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines in the Mirabel riding, with urban development in the other two municipalities having reached a ceiling.

The City of Mirabel has undergone a great deal of development, but all that remains now is farmland. Development is capped in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines. Timewise, it would make sense to return Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines to the riding of Mirabel to maintain this balance.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Mr. Bergeron and Ms. DeBellefeuille, your requests are altogether legitimate. Your presentations were very good. I don't think we would have any objection to changing the names of your ridings.

Do you have anything to add in support of this aspect?

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Unlike my colleague, I did not appear before the commission. I was waiting to see what the "final" configuration of the riding would be.

When I saw that a large portion of the City of Carignan was to be added to the federal riding of Montarville, and noted the people of Carignan's negative reaction to it, I told myself that something had to be done to show that we were receptive. Something had to be done to ensure that the people of Carignan, like the residents of Saint-Hubert, Sainte-Julie and Saint-Basile-le-Grand, would feel more of an attraction to this electoral district. That's why I suggested the name "Mont-Saint-Bruno", which is a major attraction in the riding, and the name "L'Acadie", which crosses Carignan and Saint-Basile-le-Grand, for the name of the new riding.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Go ahead, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** A name is important to the people we represent.

My colleague, Mr. Peter Schiefke, the MP for Vaudreuil—Soulanges, and I, the MP for Salaberry—Suroît, currently have a problem because all the municipalities in Soulanges are in my area. My fellow citizens and community groups are involved because they think that Soulanges is in my good friend Mr. Schiefke's riding. That's why I want to emphasize the importance of the name given to the riding, because it is something people can understand and identify with.

In the last review of the electoral map, calling the neighbouring riding Vaudreuil—Soulanges was a mistake. This time, we hope to have a name that enables most citizens, organizations and business people to be able to identify with the name of the riding.

I hope that my proposal will be adopted.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** That's all I have to say, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

**Hon. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my three Bloc Québécois colleagues for being here today.

Mr. Bergeron, according to the commission's report on electoral redistribution, the City of Carignan was opposed to transferring part of its territory from the riding of Beloeil—Chambly to the riding of Montarville.

If things were to remain as they are, why do you believe that the name "Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie" or "L'Acadie—Mont-Saint-Bruno" would be more representative than "Montarville"?

• (1210)

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Madam Chair, as I've had the opportunity to mention before, the name Montarville only applies to the City of Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville. The municipalities of Sainte-Julie and Saint-Basile-le-Grand are not a part of Montarville, and nor is Saint-Hubert. Not only that, but the City of Carignan would end up reluctantly in the riding of Montarville.

How then to establish a feeling of belonging for three of the municipalities in the riding, when there is no real community of interest? The only community of interest for these municipalities is Mont-Saint-Bruno, which everyone can see from anywhere in the riding.

Not only that, but the Acadie River runs not only through the City of Carignan, but also the City of Saint-Basile-le-Grand. The people of Carignan might say that their population has been split into two parts, but that they nevertheless feel a certain sense of community with the riding of Mont-Saint-Bruno—L'Acadie, or L'Acadie—Mont-Saint-Bruno, because of a geographical feature.

That's why something other than a community of interest is needed to rally the people in the riding of Montarville, which is rather like a mosaic. As my colleague pointed out, I too believe that a name can be very important in terms of people's sense of belonging, of feeling included in an entity like an electoral district, particularly at the federal level.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you very much.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, in your address, you said that the new proposed boundaries were not unanimously agreed to, but rather the outcome of consensus.

What do you mean by that?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** When I prepared my brief for the commission, I consulted the three reeves in my riding and none of the reeves, nor the RCM council, wished to oppose the boundaries. Only one small municipality, Pointe-des-Cascades, was against it. Its population of approximately 1,800 is currently in the riding of Vaudreuil-Soulanges. Its opposition wasn't particularly polarized, nor given much media coverage, because it was unrelated to the decisions being made by the RCM reeves.

The fact is that RCM of Haut-Saint-Laurent is split in two. The municipalities in the new riding of Châteauguay—Les Jardins-de-Napierville are not necessarily disappointed with this split. The only opposition comes from a single anglophone citizen who expressed his dissatisfaction with the new boundary because he felt that the anglophone community, which is concentrated in the RCM of Haut-Saint-Laurent, was now split in two. However, that was really the only objection, and it did not garner much support from others in our consultations.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** All right, thank you.

Madam Chair, if I still have enough time, I'd like to ask Mr. Garon a brief question.

Mr. Garon, is your work to keep the City of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines in the riding of Mirabel politically advantageous to you?

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Mr. Fergus, you know that I always tell the truth.

We did the calculations, and the outcome was a huge gap of 0%. The only difference it makes is to increase the size of my area and give me more work. As I am tireless, I have nevertheless come here to make the request.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Thank you, Mr. Garon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Fergus.

You have the floor, Mr. Therrien.

**Mr. Alain Therrien (La Prairie, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank the three MPs who came to inform us of their opinion.

My first question is for Mr. Bergeron.

Mr. Bergeron, I am very familiar with your riding and believe that it's a good idea to add the names "Mont-Saint-Bruno" and "L'Acadie" in view of how important the Acadie River is to Carignan.

I would imagine that you have received some positive comments from people who live in that municipality. They might well be saying that, in a way, they feel more at home in this new riding.

Is that the case?

• (1215)

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** I must say that so far, the comments about this addition have been rather negative. What's needed is to find positive aspects that would make the people of Carignan comfortable with the idea. I believe that what's worrying the people of Carignan is the fact that its residents will be split between two different ridings.

So I think changing the name of the riding would go some way towards easing the transition, because they are unhappy about joining the riding of Montarville. I, on the other hand, welcome it with open arms, but don't think that the feeling is mutual. Something other than just the MP is needed to get them interested in this new name for the riding.

I also think it's important to mention the enormous amount of confusion that exists between the Quebec riding and the federal riding, including the very different boundaries. While the name "Montarville" makes a certain amount of sense for the Quebec riding, it makes no sense for the federal riding because it applies to the City of Saint-Bruno-de-Montarville. In my view, the federal riding ended up with the name "Montarville" because it just copied what Quebec did.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Thank you, Mr. Bergeron.

Ms. DeBellefeuille, you said that the boundaries of your riding were the outcome of a degree of consensus, but that the decision was not unanimous.

What about its name?

When you attended the October 3 meeting, did some people say that they could live with and liked the new name, or did you get the feeling they didn't like it?

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

In the views that were exchanged with participants at the public hearing, it was clear to everyone that the word "Soulanges" should appear in the riding's name because an entire section of the Soulanges Canal would henceforth be part of the riding. There was therefore no opposition on that score. There was consensus.

Then there was discussion of the word "Suroît". The members of the commission hesitated about it, because they had heard, in earlier days, that the word "Suroît" meant a lot to our area. It had in the past, but for many years now it has not been as significant. We mentioned this to the members, who were very surprised, I would say, but they obviously understood, because they didn't suggest any other alternative.

The word "Beauharnois" also came up, because it's the name of a sizeable city and a provincial county.

So there was consensus on the names "Soulanges" and "Beauharnois", and also "Salaberry", which is already in the name of the riding, and also because Salaberry-de-Valleyfield is a large city in my riding with which you are very familiar.

I was therefore very surprised to read in the final proposal that the members of the commission had recommended another name, which was not relevant and had not even been suggested by the people who attended the public hearing. And yet it had been unanimously agreed that the riding could be called Beauharnois—Salaberry—Soulanges—Huntingdon.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Thank you, Ms. DeBellefeuille.

Mr. Garon, I think you gave a good explanation of the community of interest. I was certainly convinced by what you said.

You also talked about the people of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, who were not consulted. I know that you keep in close contact with your fellow citizens.

You are no doubt approached by these people when you're there. What do they say to you?

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** I've personally taken on the task of speaking on behalf of the community. Before coming here today, I received a message from the community. You have the letter from the mayor of Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, who was rather put out when she saw that Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines had been removed from Mirabel without any form of consultation or prior notice. So was the member of Quebec's provincial parliament.

You know, this county includes Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, another city called La Plaine, as well as Saint-Janvier, a large neighbourhood in Mirabel. The ties between these two municipalities resemble those between Rouyn and Noranda. People go back and forth every day between these two cities, whether for work, leisure or school.

I've taken on the role of reporting the community's grievances to you. In Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, it's more than a matter of consensus, and there is unanimity. All of the comments I received indicate that the commission made a poor decision.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** In terms of your work as an MP, what is the impact of splintering this community of interest?

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** First of all, it has an impact on all the organizations and the entire social fabric. In our work as MPs, we are called upon daily to help people and direct them to the appropriate resources. Let's take the example of Centre Marie Eve, which provides psychological counselling. The centre is a key organization whose staff work in Mirabel and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, but not in La Rivière-du-Nord.

The Mesures alternatives des Basses-Laurentides organization works in the field of justice. Its services are available in Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and Mirabel. Earlier on, I spoke to you about ABL Immigration.

The user committees for the health system cover Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines and Mirabel. It's also important to consider the reality of our farmers and all of our agriculture-related endeavours. Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines is 87% agricultural, as is Mirabel. There are other cities like Saint-Placide, at 95%, and Saint-Joseph-du-Lac, at 70%. That's not the case in the middle of the Laurentians, where La Rivière-du-Nord is located.

• (1220)

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Therrien.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you to everybody for being here.

All of my questions have already been answered.

Thank you, everyone, for asking them for me, so you have all my time.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney, do you know what I was going to say? That's amazing. Laurence and Andre just told me that committee members choose six questions, and before we got to the end of the first round, our witnesses provided answers to all six of them, so thank you. I appreciate your due diligence.

We will continue with Mr. Gourde or Mr. Berthold.

[Translation]

**Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC):** As my NDP colleague put it so well, all of our questions have already been answered. We do not disagree with the requests from our colleagues today. There is nothing more to be said.

**The Chair:** All right.

Ms. Romanado, over to you now.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.):** All I want to do is congratulate my colleagues, because we have no further questions.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Therrien.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** I have a question for my three colleagues.

Your position appears to be very clear, and I find that most interesting.

How do you interpret the fact that the members of the commission do not appear to have understood the arguments you put forward?

You could each perhaps take another minute to explain why the members of the commission are so reluctant.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** I'll begin by saying that I have nothing to complain about to the commission, except for the fact that this riding was created in a previous exercise that did not involve them, even though there is no real community of interest apart from Mont Saint-Bruno.

In view of this fact, what can really be done to create a sense of community in this riding, where there is no real core, apart from the topographical feature of Mont Saint-Bruno? There's no real basis for a sense of belonging, but I think the problem lies in the name.

I was just waiting to see the outcome, the final proposal, to determine whether I was going to submit this proposed name change, and in view of the fact that the City of Carignan was still included, I told myself that this was the right moment to act.

**Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille:** I just wanted to tell you that the members of the commission were listening.

It wasn't easy to redistribute our district in terms of boundaries. It's true that the regional municipalities in the county have been splintered. However, the fact that Vaudreuil—Soulanges was experiencing so much demographic growth made the exercise a difficult one for the commission.

That's why, even though the community development corporation submitted a brief saying that it would not really be a good idea to separate the RCMs, they didn't really have that option. That's why I said there had been consensus.

We don't understand the commission's refusal. We don't understand why we were consulted about a proposed name, and after having listened to us, they came up with another name that had nothing to do with the comments that were made. That's what we find surprising from the commission.



That's why we are here today to encourage the committee members to prepare a proper report, with recommendations. If the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec is unwilling to change course, the government could introduce a bill to adopt all the name changes we are proposing today.

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** I'd say that...

**The Chair:** All right.

Ms. Blaney, would you like Mr. Garon to answer Mr. Therrien's question?

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Yes, of course.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Denis Garon:** Thank you. That's very kind and I appreciate it.

For the Lower Laurentians and the cities located there, it's important to understand that it was extremely complex for the commission, because it had added a new riding.

It came about after consultations were held during the hearings and there were a lot of criticisms. The commission was more or less required to completely redo the boundaries of this new riding.

In the first electoral map that included the key riding of Les Pays-d'en-Haut, just to the north of mine, they had been very careful not to splinter any communities of interest, but had to start from scratch. In that instance, there was indeed a domino effect. As there had not been any consultations for the second part, it would appear that in spite of their good intentions, they thought, probably wrongly, that Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines was a community of interest with the municipalities of La Rivière-du-Nord, which is not the case.

That's why the commission exists and why we are now conducting hearings. We would just like to reiterate the fact that a community of interest was unfortunately splintered, and that it's possible to return it to Mirabel without any direct electoral or demographic impact, and no domino effect. That's why the process has been complex for the commission, and I'd like to thank its members for the work they have done. Nevertheless, I think a further step is needed.

● (1225)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Do you have any other questions, Ms. Blaney?

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I have no more questions.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bergeron, Ms. DeBellefeuille, and Mr. Garon, thank you for coming today. If you'd like to add anything, please contact the committee clerks, who will pass the information on to the committee members.

I wish you a pleasant afternoon.

[*English*]

For PROC committee members, as the next panel commences...and I know most of the panel are here. As we will get set up, I understand we just want to have a quick conversation in regard to the other study we're doing.

I'll pass the floor over to Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you so much, Chair.

I just want to clarify. I did do a notice of motion about having the special rapporteur come in to talk to us about the work he is doing. It sounds like, from the last conversation in committee, people are open to that, so I was just going to check if we could move forward, add him to the list and move on.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Monsieur Berthold.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** I'm okay with that.

**The Chair:** So there's no problem.

[*English*]

I feel we have everybody's agreement. I'll confirm with our one member from the Bloc, but I do believe that's fine.

As we proceed to inviting witnesses, the letter that was sent to PROC committee members through me was about people who should come on their own, and we will add the Right Honourable David Johnston to the list of people who come on their own. That will be added and is noted for the record.

[*Translation*]

We're going to begin the second part of the meeting and welcome the second group of witnesses.

[*English*]

We'll pause for about 30 seconds while they set up.

● (1225)

(Pause)

● (1225)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** In the second hour, we'll be continuing our study of the Federal Electoral Boundaries Commission for Quebec's report.

We have with us today Mr. Luc Berthold, M.P., Mégantic—L'Érable, the Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau, P.C., M.P., Compton—Stanstead, and Mr. Louis Plamondon, M.P., Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel.

You will each have four minutes for an opening statement after which will proceed to questions from the committee members.

Mr. Berthold, you have the floor.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleagues for allowing me to sit here as a witness today.

After having heard presentations from several of my colleagues, it's now my turn. Thanks also to my two colleagues for being here.

As you will see, it's not particularly complicated. We have each examined our respective districts and everything that affects neighbouring ridings. We agree on the fact that the proposal we are going to make today was unanimously adopted by the three parties, and in particular by the three MPs affected by the changes in the district of Mégantic—L'Érable. It's a very large district, and it neighbours the respective ridings of my two colleagues. We consulted one another and also consulted the population on the recommendations being presented.

I do not intend to repeat the presentation. I sent a letter, which you have all acknowledged. I believe that's what's important. I would just like to underscore the fact that the district of Mégantic—L'Érable currently includes 50 municipalities. The city in the middle is Thetford Mines. I represent three RCMs and the district of Mégantic—L'Érable falls into three administrative regions.

For those who may not know what it's like to be an MP, it means that I meet with three different groups of agricultural producers and three different farm women's circles to serve each of the RCMs. In short, that's a lot of meetings.

Our proposal, however striking it may appear, is to add an RCM to the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, specifically the RCM of Lotbinière. That would lead to my representing 61 municipalities rather than 50. And yet I'm perfectly at ease with this proposal. It's part of my role.

Unfortunately—and I said so when the members of the commission came here—they had to work under the statute in force at that time. It's true that there were not enough voters in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable. That's why we had to do this work.

The initial proposal included various municipalities in Lotbinière, and following consultation with Mr. Gourde, the MP for Lotbinière, we joined forces to put forward a new proposal, one that would be more in keeping with the wishes of the people and the communities of interest.

The problem we face today, and that's why we are asking the commission to backtrack, has to do with the municipalities that were added to the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable from the riding of Compton—Stanstead. To be perfectly honest, there are very few ties between the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable and these municipalities. Moreover, it would add a fifth RCM to the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable.

In the interest of the people, the elected members and the community itself, it would be preferable for these municipalities remain in the riding of Compton—Stanstead, particularly as there has not been an opportunity to discuss the matter because this transfer had not been part of the initial proposal.

In addition, I would like to keep the municipality of Villeroy, which is already in Mégantic—L'Érable, and add two other municipalities from Lotbinière to avoid splitting the municipalities in the RCM of Lotbinière into three different ridings.

It's rather complex because, if you look at the maps, the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable is shaped like a big banana. We are surrounded

by other ridings and it looks as if it would be possible to take municipalities and move them from one riding to another. But it's not as simple as all that.

All the mayors who were consulted, and all the RCMs, agree with the proposal we are now making. We have the support of the people.

I'm willing to answer any questions you may have and any requests for further details. However, our proposal is reasonable and consistent with the communities of interest. It's the outcome of an agreement between the MPs affected. It is not being presented for partisan reasons, but rather to give proper regard to the communities of interest, and because we are very familiar with these communities and know how they work, and with whom they interact.

• (1230)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Compton—Stanstead, Lib.):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to explain to the committee why I believe the municipalities of Weedon, Lingwick and Scotstown should remain in the riding of Compton—Stanstead. We're talking here about 3,767 inhabitants. The RCM, the three municipalities involved, and Luc Berthold, the member of Parliament for Lac Mégantic—L'Érable, all support my position.

What I'm asking for is based on the importance of aligning the boundaries of the ridings as closely as possible with those of Quebec's other administrative boundaries. My argument will focus in particular on RCMs, the regional county municipalities, but it is equally applicable to neighbourhoods, municipalities and administrative regions. It rests on the basic underpinnings of electoral redistribution, which means giving consideration to the personality of these municipalities, avoiding unnecessary changes to existing riding boundaries, and giving due regard to each RCM's or each region's sense of belonging, communities of interest and key commercial, industrial and farming ventures.

The municipalities of Lingwick, Scotstown and Weedon have a strong sense of attachment to their RCM of Haut Saint-François. RCMs are at the heart of regional economic, socio-cultural, historic and geographic vitality. RCM's are bodies that maintain the consistency and cohesion of actions by elected representatives, including initiatives under federal government programs. In the name of efficiency and cohesiveness, I recommend not duplicating services provided by teams in the ridings.

One of the considerations mentioned in the act addresses historical relations. For several decades now, the people of Scotstown, Lingwick and Weedon, have primarily been using public services, including health care services, as well as businesses and cultural or sports centres in Cookshire-Eaton, East Angus and Sherbrooke.

Community and economic activity is organized around the RCM. One has only to think of the Chambre de commerce du Haut-Saint-François, the Centre local de développement du Haut-Saint-François, the Carrefour jeunesse-emploi du Haut-Saint-François and the Société d'aide au développement de la collectivité du Haut-Saint-François, the SADC. Residents of Weedon, Lingwick and Scotstown rarely go to Lac-Mégantic ou Thetford Mines for services. The same can be said for work.

The populations of Scotstown, Lingwick and Weedon are part of the collective identity, not only of the RMC of Haut-Saint-François, but also the Estrie administrative region. In this instance, the concept of a territorial whole, which is in the act, should take regional attachment, which is always very strong in Estrie into account. The Union des producteurs agricoles de l'Estrie and the Agence de mise en valeur de la forêt privée de l'Estrie are good examples of this.

For all these reasons, I recommend avoiding the splitting of RCMs, neighbourhoods, municipalities and administrative regions as much as possible when redrawing electoral boundaries. I am therefore asking that Weedon, Lingwick and Scotstown remain in the electoral district of Compton—Stanstead.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

● (1235)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Bibeau.

Welcome, Mr. Plamondon. The floor is yours.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, BQ):** Good afternoon.

Thank you for welcoming me here to the committee as a witness.

I'm from the second most beautiful riding in Canada. Of course first place goes to the one you represent.

On the matter of expanding the area by adding three municipalities, I think that my colleague Luc Berthold and hon. minister Bibeau clearly said that these three municipalities have much stronger affinities with their region.

The reason why I've been given these three municipalities is that there is a population shortfall in the riding I represent. The three municipalities together have a population of 2,000. When the members of the commission considered the matter, they did not factor in the latest data for the riding. For example, over the past six months, six major battery production plants have been announced for the City of Bécancour. Last week, Ford made an announcement, and about six months ago, there was an announcement from General Motors.

Six similar projects have been announced. They will be worth over \$500 million. They will be built on an area equal to three football fields placed end to end. These large factories will attract lots of people to the Bécancour region. What's more, only last week it was decided to rezone 500 building lots to allow for the rapid construction of housing for the people who will be working at these plants.

The Nicolet region, in the centre of the riding, is experiencing the largest residential development in its history. In the Saurel region there are currently three construction projects under way for

residential buildings: one for 763 units, a second for 400 units and a third for 466 units. Not only that but three other projects are awaiting authorization. This would mean that within four or five months, in Saurel alone, there will be at least 2,200 more people living in these units, with two persons per unit.

This means that the population deficit of approximately 2,000 people mentioned in the commission's report will have been completely dealt with in Saurel, partly offset in Nicolet and largely offset in Bécancour. Within three years, there will be at least 5,000 more workers in the riding. I therefore fully agree that these three municipalities, which have no affinity with the riding I represent, should remain in the riding represented by Mr. Berthold. I trust that the members of the commission will understand.

The big problem will no doubt be in with the name change. For years, the riding has been identified by its three RCMs: Bécancour, Nicolet and Saurel. However, although there was nothing said about it during the testimony, when the initial meetings were being held and even when the final report was being prepared, it was decided to add the Abenaki community to the name of the riding. We are in agreement with that, of course, but there are two such communities: Odanak and Wôlinak.

It was therefore proposed that the City of Nicolet be replaced by Odanak. Nicolet has existed for 350 years—we celebrated this last year—and it is older than Canada. So the city has been there for a long time.

The Odanak community does not agree because it pointed out that there is also Wôlinak. I therefore wrote to the grand Council of the Wabanaki nation, which represents both communities. I have given you a copy of the letter. It says that the Abenaki people would like to add their name to the riding without removing the name "Nicolet".

Every time I was in contact with the commissioner, Mr. Chamberland, he repeated that Odanak was going to be added. There was never any intent to remove Nicolet. This whole story almost led to a revolt in the riding. If you could only see the number of letters—I didn't send you all of them—from the people in the municipalities who wrote me in support of keeping Nicolet in the name of the riding.

Let's get back to the word "Abenaki", the name of the nation. The Abenaki people want that name added to the riding's name, but in the Abenaki language. That would mean spelling it : "Alnôbak" or "Aln8bak", making the name of the riding "Alnôbak—Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel" or "Aln8bak—Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel".

● (1240)

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Plamondon.

I know that the members of this committee were wondering why I didn't say anything when the bell went off.

Mr. Plamondon, you're the MP with the most experience here in the House of Commons. That's why it's a bit difficult for me today to interrupt you. However, the next time we hear the bell, we will have to end the meeting.

We are now getting to the rounds of questions.

Mr. Gourde, you have the floor.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for Mr. Berthold.

There was the matter of three municipalities, Val-Alain, Leclercville and Villeroy. The municipalities of Val-Alain and Leclercville are in the RCM of Lotbinière. The second proposal was to incorporate them into the riding represented by Mr. Plamondon. Villeroy is adjacent to these two municipalities. It was part of the riding you represent, but according to the second proposal, it would be incorporated into the one represented by Mr. Plamondon.

My understanding is that in the municipalities of Val-Alain and Leclercville, which I still represent, people would really like to remain in the RCM of Lotbinière. They regretfully accepted the idea of leaving the RCM, which would lose half of its area, to be added to the federal riding of Mégantic—L'Érable, which covers the same area as Quebec's riding of Lotbinière—Mégantic.

Mr. Berthold, how important do you think it is for the community of interest in the RCM of Lotbinière to remain in Lotbinière?

And tell me more about the close ties that exist between the municipalities of Val-Alain, Leclercville and Villeroy, from the economic standpoint, and also in terms of the communities of interest.

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** As you mentioned, an attempt is being made to splinter this RCM. Previously, when the first proposal was made, the people in the RCM of Lotbinière found it somewhat shocking to see that their RCM was being split in two. Further to some communication efforts, we managed to arrange for it to more closely resemble the provincial riding so that the residents could end up dealing with the same people they were accustomed to. The provincial riding is Lotbinière-Frontenac. It's already a pairing that shares affinities. However, there are no economic, social, cultural or other affinities with the riding represented by my colleague Mr. Plamondon.

The people of Lotbinière clearly want to remain where they are. There is a sense of belonging that they don't want to lose by finding themselves in a riding located in another administrative region. We're talking about the Centre-du-Québec region. Once again, it would mean some additional problems for them. Even though it's at the provincial level, the people they would have to deal with would no longer be the same. They don't want that.

As for Villeroy, the ties are with the municipality of Plessisville, whether for entertainment, the economy, groceries or anything else. There are therefore no direct links. That's why we recommend not going in that direction and instead keeping these three municipalities in the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable.

As I said earlier, the area looks like a big banana, but people need to know that we're also going to represent a larger population. In my proposal, I requested a name change, which will surprise

people. My current riding is Mégantic—L'Érable, but we're talking here about four RCMs. To make sure that people understand that the riding represents a huge area, I'm going to propose the name "Appalaches—Mégantic—L'Érable—Lotbinière" to the commission.

That way, when people contact our office, they will know they're dealing with a very large riding. We don't have enough resources to have a full-time office in each of the RCMs. Yet people need to feel a sense of belonging in this riding. The only way to accomplish that, in view of the fact that we cover so many administrative regions, RCMs, is to include the name that represents them in the name of the riding. That might well give them a feeling of attachment.

• (1245)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** The riding of Lévis—Lotbinière is a victim of its own success. Its population has increased enormously and now stands at 125,000. However, the riding will have to give up a portion of its population. That's why the RCM next to your riding has to be split. For the next redistribution, however, which will be in 10 years, we hope it will be back together again. That will no doubt be within the riding you are currently representing, Mr. Berthold.

Do you believe that this reunification is important? The RCM of Lotbinière has been together for 20 years. For this group of small municipalities, it's virtually the only factor that represents a form of unity. It's been overwhelmed by large centres. The idea that they might all be reunited again in 10 years is important to them.

Do you think the committee needs to take note of this?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** It's important not to divide the RCM of Lotbinière into three parts, because it is indeed hoping to be back together in this same riding the next time the electoral map is redrawn.

It's important. I think that it's one of the things that the commission need to take into consideration. I can only hope that they will accept the unanimous proposals made by all the municipalities involved, which we are representing here today.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** I'll conclude by thanking Ms. Bibeau and Mr. Plamondon for keeping an open mind with regard to Mr. Berthold's proposal. Otherwise, it would have been difficult. Thank you sincerely for being so obliging.

I have no further questions.

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

Ms. Romanado, you have the floor.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

I'd like to thank my colleagues for being with us today. I'd also like to thank them for answering most of the questions that were raised. It's as if Mr. Berthold was somewhat aware of how we go about doing things!

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

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I have only one question about the riding names that were proposed.

In the report, there were some comments from citizens saying that the riding names were too long. The commission therefore tried to shorten some of them by removing some of the city or regional names.

I'd like to know what you think of that, Mr. Plamondon, given that you suggested adding some names.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** I checked and found that there were 25 names in Canada that were just as long. One such example is Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. That's pretty long.

There's also West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country.

In Quebec, we have Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix; Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques; Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs; and Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, to mention only a few.

So there are some long names, and it's fine to have names like that because, as Mr. Berthold was saying earlier, they actually designate the region where people live and enable them to know where to go when they occasionally might need services from MPs.

• (1250)

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** We worked hard in my office to find a single name that would cover all of the communities in Lotbinière, l'Érable, and Lac-Mégantic, among others. Our riding begins at the river and goes all the way to the American border. Les Appalaches is all very well, but this region doesn't cover the whole riding. We couldn't come up with a name that, on its own, would give people a sense of affinity. It's not that we didn't try, because I know that every time I have to refer to the name of my riding, it's going to use up half my speaking time, and you know how I like to talk.

So we spent a lot of time searching, and the only solution we came up with to help people readily know where they would have to go to vote in federal elections, and who their MP is, was to add Lotbinière to the name of the riding. Even though we, as MPs, want everyone to know who we are, it's impossible. People need to know the name of their riding, who their MP is and where their riding office is, in the event that they need help to deal with a problem.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** All right.

Ms. Bibeau, do you have anything to add?

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** That's kind of you, but I believe we've covered everything.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Okay, thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Romanado.

Over to you now, Mr. Therrien.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Greetings to the three witnesses who are here with the committee today. I'm very pleased to see you and to find that you get along very well with your neighbours. When riding boundaries are being discussed, it's important for everyone to be on the same page. Oth-

erwise, it becomes more difficult for the members of the commission to agree on things.

Mr. Plamondon, I'm going to briefly summarize what you said, and then allow you to continue. You said that your riding had a demographic shortfall and that this was why there was a proposal to add three municipalities totaling approximately 2,000 inhabitants. However, as a result of the outstanding work done by the current MP, considerable population growth is expected, and it would more than compensate for a deficit of 2,000 people if the change were not made. That's my understanding of it.

Have I given an accurate overview of the numbers in your riding?

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Yes, precisely.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Okay.

Are the people in these three municipalities happy about this?

Do the people in your community feel that we take their comments into consideration?

Do they have the feeling that history is finally on their side and that they are in the right place, or are they saying something else?

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** The three municipalities confirmed in writing that they did not want to be annexed to the riding I represent because they have no affinities with it, whether economically, socially or culturally.

As Mr. Berthold and Ms. Bibeau said earlier, the people in these ridings prefer to stay in the social setting that they are accustomed to. These are three magnificent municipalities, but the only reason given for attaching them to my riding was to make up for a population deficit of 2,000. And yet the recent statistics show that the shortfall no longer exists.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Right.

It's clear that the members of the commission may not be aware of some data. Perhaps they don't know about these development statistics. You were right to mention them here, Mr. Plamondon.

As an economist, I know that forecasts are not always accurate. Over the next two years, how many people do you think will be added to the population of the riding you represent?

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** I believe that at least 5,000 people will be added.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** So that would compensate for...

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** It would make up the deficit.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** That's right.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** It's mainly the name that I find problematic.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** Earlier, you mentioned that several ridings had a name that was longer than the name of the riding you represent.

One of the proposals is to remove the name of the City of Nicolet.

What do the people in your part of the country, Nicolet, think about this idea? How did they react when they heard this?

• (1255)

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** All of the towns and cities in the RCM of Nicolet-Yamaska wrote me to say that they were unhappy about removing the name "Nicolet". Residents of the RCM of Bécancour also asked us to make an effort to keep the City of Nicolet in the name because it accurately designates their riding. Even the RCM of Pierre-De Saurel sent me a letter in support of keeping Nicolet in the name.

In the course of all these negotiations, it was never about removing the name of Nicolet. In the final report tabled in the House of Commons, it was all about the riding of Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel, to which the name "Odanak" would be added. The Odanak community sent a letter saying that it was not "Odanak" that it wished to add, but rather the name "Abenaki", pronounced and written in the Abenaki language, because there are two Abenaki nations.

The Abenaki are a highly cultured people. One of the top commentators on Radio-Canada in the early years was Mr. Nolet. One of Canada's great opera singers, Mr. O'Bomsawin, comes from the Abenaki nation. There is also the extraordinary Abenaki Museum. In Quebec, the only CEGEP operated by and for indigenous people is located on Abenaki land. People from all the nations go there to study.

It's therefore a nation that is thriving, and it would like us to speak about the Abenaki nation in writing, in the Abenaki language, because its people are developing their language. There is also an Abenaki national anthem. In the various schools, there are many Abenaki songs. Their environment is wonderful.

In the Abenaki language, "Abenaki" is pronounced "Alnôbak". In their letter, they specify that like they would like to add this name, without replacing Nicolet. The new name of the riding would therefore be "Alnôbak—Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel", or "Alnôbak—Bécancour—Nicolet—Saurel", which would be terrific. It would accurately describe the composition of the riding. I have the unanimous support of the riding and our Abenaki friends for this name.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** The name might look a little long, but as you pointed out earlier, there are many ridings with even longer names. The new thrust, which everyone is in favour of, is to add indigenous names to make it clear that these communities are included.

So am I to understand that the name was approved unanimously and had the support of all the people you represent?

Is that right?

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Yes, that's right.

**The Chair:** Mr. Therrien, you're speaking time is over. You will be able to speak again in the second round of questions.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** I'll listen to what you have to say now.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Plamondon.

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor now.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Madam Chair, I don't have any questions. I feel that the presentation clarified the list that we need to get to.

I'm sorry, Luc. I have no hard questions for you—maybe later.

[Translation]

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

We are now beginning the second round of questions.

You have the floor, Mr. Gourde.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Berthold, do you think you'll be able to provide the same services to 61 municipalities, as stated in the proposal?

**Mr. Luc Berthold:** We're going to work hard at it. It's not up to us to choose what citizens want, but they can rest easy. Whether they are spread over 50 or 61 municipalities, those we represent are entitled to services, and we will take whatever steps are needed to provide them. That leads me to mention two other things.

I've heard a lot of comments from my colleagues, and two things stood out. As I said earlier, I know that the members of the commission did their work under the act that was in force at the time. I nevertheless feel that we need to take these two things into account when the time comes to work on the next review of the electoral map.

First of all, it would be important to consider the role of regional MPs and the reality of rural ridings, which are growing apace and including more and more municipalities. That's my message to the commission, and also perhaps to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. What role do we want MPs to play on behalf of the citizens they represent?

We are legislators and our duty is to represent a percentage of people, based on the number of votes we received. However, our role has evolved over the years. We now provide a growing number of services to citizens. That needs to be taken into consideration the next time the electoral map is being redrawn. It's important.

Secondly, we could consider a second series of public hearings for any major changes—a term that will have to be defined—being proposed for certain ridings. That would enable this committee and the government to further study proposals that we may not have been able to anticipate nor had the opportunity to study and submit to our citizens.

For example, we never expected the proposal to transfer three municipalities from Compton—Stanstead to the riding of Mégantic—L'Érable. So when the hearings were held in our riding, we hadn't had the opportunity to discuss them. It just happened out of the blue. So the last chance people have to make their voices heard rests with us here today.

I therefore feel that when major changes are proposed, it would be a good idea to hold a short series of public hearings to allow people to state their views. The recommendations would be for our eyes, on the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, because I know that the members of the commission do not have the power to change statutes. We, on the other hand, do. For the next review of the electoral map, it would be worthwhile for all parties to take the time required to think about it.

• (1300)

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** Thank you, Mr. Berthold.

Mr. Plamondon, the riding you represent will no doubt enter the history books in a few months as a result of your longevity in the House of Commons.

How many months away are you from setting the all-time Canadian longevity record for a member of Parliament?

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** On September 4, I will have been here for 39 years. I believe the record is held by Mr. Herb Gray, an MP from Ontario who sat for 39 years and seven months. We overlapped. There was also Mr. John Diefenbaker, who sat for 39 years and four months. Another MP sat for 39 years and two months. He was elected in 1867, the first year of Confederation.

If, as expected, there's an election in 2025, I'll enter the record books, but nobody will look at them.

**Mr. Jacques Gourde:** A record like that will be hard to beat.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Gourde.

Ms. Romanado has said that she didn't have any questions to ask on behalf of the Liberal Party.

So it's over to you, Mr. Therrien.

**Mr. Alain Therrien:** I wanted to ask Ms. Bibeau a question earlier, but she told her colleagues that she had nothing more to say, and so I didn't dare.

We've heard a lot of talk about the RCMs, which are specific to Quebec. Each of you mentioned them, but I'd like to have a final round to talk about and obtain a better idea of the importance of RCMs in Quebec. I will give each of you time to say why they are important and why they need to be taken into consideration. In particular, I would like to hear what Ms. Bibeau has to say, because I think a riding is going to be split.

**Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau:** It's very important, because the small municipalities of only a few thousand, or even only a few hundred, inhabitants work extensively with their RCM and receive shared services. Many community and economic organizations are developed around their RCM.

With respect to services, with a view to future changes, it would be interesting to compare the role of an MP who represents an urban riding of six square kilometres to the role of an MP like me, who represents a riding of 5,000 square kilometres, with 35 municipalities and five RCMs. I'm aware of the fact that some MPs have ridings that are even larger.

It's true that when there are several municipalities in a single RCM, whether 3 or 15, the same work needs to be done with the RCM management team. Conversely, for the director of an RCM, the work is already being done with a riding team. This means that the management team has to work with two or three MPs, which also increases their workload.

I believe I gave a good explanation in my address of the dynamics between MPs and the RCMs, including how we work together, and in my view, the less RCMs are split, the better it is, for us and for them.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** When the Government of Quebec created the RCMs, its goal was to establish an economic, social and cultural development framework that would make it possible, in order to deal with things like health services, for these RCMs to have a budget and to operate in alignment with regional interests. Often, when the commission's members look into redrawing the boundaries strictly on the basis of the number of inhabitants, they do not take this highly effective administrative structure introduced by Quebec into account.

For example, the Pierre-De Saurel RCM had some wind farms built, the only ones in Quebec, and they are owned by the community, not private interests. This brings in net earnings of \$1.2 million to the RCM, which redistributes this money to address collective needs. If two municipalities from a neighbouring riding are added as a result of the redistribution, they will also want their share of the pie, even though they had not taken on responsibility for the loan and had not contributed to the project. That's how complex things like this can be.

Something should therefore be done along the lines of what the minister just said. It's very important to take these economic structures into consideration when redrawing electoral boundaries in the ridings

• (1305)

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

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I have no questions.

[Translation]

**The Chair:** We took some of Ms. Blaney's speaking time to listen to this remarkable answer.

Mr. Berthold, Ms. Bibeau and Mr. Plamondon, thank you very much for spending so much time with us. If you have any other comments, please send them to the clerks, who will pass them on to everyone.

We wish you a pleasant afternoon.

**Mr. Louis Plamondon:** Thank you for hearing us out.

[English]

**The Chair:** PROC committee members, I will just say that Miriam will be back next week, so kudos to Sophia and Christine for keeping us on track this week.

During the two constituency weeks, as we are heading into two constituency weeks, within one of those weeks we will be having the Prime Minister's chief of staff appear. I am under the impression that there is a little bit of back and forth going on to confirm resources and the date. It is feeling like it will be the second week of the constituency weeks. The minute I have a date and time, you will have a date and time so that there's ample time for us all to participate.

The second thing is that we've seen the Right Honourable David Johnston added to the list of individuals who were in the letter. We also have another list of people we've invited. When Miriam returns, we will get the list consolidated and shared with all members in case it needs a refresher or anything like that, so that we can satisfy the intentions of this committee when it comes to foreign election interference.

Because we have had such a fruitful committee so far on foreign election interference, I have mentioned to some of you that there is

a supplemental budget that would need to be passed. I have been given that budget and ask for your support in seeing that passed. I will also mention to you, based on what the intentions of this committee are, and the added time we've asked for, I'm confident that these resources will not be enough, because we are adding meetings and I want to make sure that the resources are here for us, including coffee and snacks.

With that, can I make sure that everyone is okay with the passage of this budget? Perfect.

With that, to anybody celebrating Ramadan, *Ramadan mubarak*.

Easter is coming—my birthday is coming—so I wish everybody a happy Easter as well.

Keep well and safe, and I'll see you after becoming a year older, after the constituency weeks. Thank you. Take care.

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