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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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•(1630)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): I call us all back to order. It was a nice break.

Mr. Christopherson, you still have the floor on your motion.

Go ahead on a point or order, Mr. Martin, if it's brief and if it is a point of order.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): It is, and I think it's a point of order in its most elementary form.

I'd like to know specifically under what authority you have called us to order and where in the Standing Orders you can convene a meeting with only five minutes' notice. If you could quote me chapter and verse as to where in the Standing Orders or the jurisprudence of this place you can convene a meeting that way, I'd like you to let me know, as a professional courtesy to another chair. It may happen to me.

The Chair: Sure. It was something I had discussed earlier with my clerk, so under good guidance, I knew I could do it. She will look that passage up for you and share it with you.

Mr. Pat Martin: I would like to see that.

The Chair: Would it be okay if I turn to Mr. Christopherson while you're doing that, or would you like to wait?

Mr. Pat Martin: No, I think I would like to wait, because I'm tempted to challenge the Chair if I'm not satisfied with your clerk's explanation of the authority.

The Chair: On the same point of order, Mr. Reid.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Were we actually adjourned or was it just suspended for the five minutes?

The Chair: I left the chair and went to take care of some health issues, so I can't tell you exactly what occurred.

If, indeed, we adjourned, which I think we did—

Mr. Pat Martin: The language I heard was, “This meeting is adjourned”.

The Chair: —then I have the ability as the chair to reconvene immediately.

Mr. Scott Reid: It was one of those information things.

The Chair: There was a motion earlier today that we wouldn't concur in an adjournment motion, so how we got there, we're not certain. We'll just wait.

Mr. Scott Reid: Now I think I understand. You didn't adjourn; the occupant of the chair, the vice-chair adjourned. I'm sorry, I thought you had suspended while you were going out to deal with health issues. We were all trying to dance around that—skate, yes—but now we've fallen through the hole in the middle of the ice.

The Chair: Under “Role of Chairs”, there is a list of administrative responsibilities, and one of them is to call committee meetings, which I just did. That's on page 1031 of O'Brien and Bosc.

•(1635)

Mr. Pat Martin: Elsewhere in the same chapter, do we see the notice required for meetings?

The Chair: The clerk reminds me that the only time there's a time limit to the notice of motion is under Standing Orders 106(1) or 106(4), which, I'm sure, have to do with exactly that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Chair, may I also join the point of order?

The Chair: Sure, why not?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Even though we all know what's going on here, and I appreciate the opposition's position on this and I think they appreciate ours, I find it disappointing, to say the very least, Mr. Chair, that when you took a brief respite for health issues and the opposition and everyone around this table knew that we had not given agreement to adjourn the meeting at its regularly scheduled time, at one o'clock, the opposition, who filled in for less than five minutes, tried to adjourn the meeting. Procedurally, they can certainly do that. I find it disappointing they would attempt to do that.

If we want to deal with how this meeting will end on a strictly procedural matter, that's fine with us. We'll see when we get there.

The Chair: This is not really a point of order, so I'd like to kind of get beyond this and move on.

Madame Latendresse.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): I just want it to be on the record that I meant to suspend the meeting. We all understand what's happening here, and I thought I could do that at that point.

[Translation]

In any case, everyone here is using whatever means available and precedents to silence the opposition, to ensure that our motion is not heard or debated. I just want to remedy that and give my colleague an opportunity to continue later on and for an even longer time.

[English]

The Chair: Are we okay? Do you have all the answers you need on this point of order, Mr. Martin? I think we've shared with you.

The chair has the right to call the meeting.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm not clear on the notice required. I don't see where it talks about how much notice is required for a meeting, but perhaps you could get that information to me some other time.

The Chair: Sure, so you know, as this might happen in your own committee.

Mr. Christopherson, it has been maybe 10 or 15 minutes since I've heard your voice.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Are you going through withdrawal?

The Chair: I ask you please to carry on, and of course, with my normal warnings on the rest of the stuff.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, sir, I appreciate that.

Thank you for the floor again.

I believe I mentioned, because it's new, the fact that our esteemed colleagues in the other place had committees that travelled 25 times over the last year, and given that the Conservatives have majority control in the Senate, I would have to assume that if they didn't move the motions, they certainly voted for them because the majority had to come from somewhere. So isn't it interesting that the unelected Senate, which by the way gets a say in some parts of the execution of our election laws, the appointed Senate—which is about as far away from democracy as you can get without giving those Senate seats to people because of who their parents are—their committees travelled 25 times. Am I going to hear from the government that the Senate was wasting the time and money of Canadians by sending out their committees 25 times?

I'm not seeing any takers to refute the point, so it would seem they thought that made good sense, that having Senate committees travel on Senate business made sense.

All we're asking for is the same thing. Why does the government believe that using their majority to send Senate committees across Canada for hearings 25 times is democratic, but when the procedure and House affairs committee should dare to ask that we go out at least to a few public communities to hear from Canadians, that's undemocratic, that that is somehow a problem?

It is pretty bad, pretty bad when the Senate.... I can't believe I'm making this statement; I know it's ugly, but the truth is like that. When it comes to listening to Canadians and travelling, the Senate, it would appear, is more democratic than the Conservatives in the House of Commons are.

An hon. member: Good call.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know. I'm sorry, it's the truth. It has to stand. It's the truth.

An hon. member: Shocking.

Mr. David Christopherson: It is shocking and appalling that one of the poster children for lack of democracy, the Canadian Senate, should one-up the government, and it's the same crew that has the majority control. There goes any possibility of saying "Yes, but..."

Oh, speaking of Butt...anyway, that's another matter.

Imagine that. We live to see the day when the government managed to let our unappointed Senate be more democratic than the House they have majority control over. Imagine that. You can't even meet the standard set by the unelected Senate in terms of democracy, and you run that show too. What a joke.

All right, let's move along because I have lots and lots of stuff, and it would seem I have lots and lots of time, so let's move along.

We're posing the issue in our motion that we should be travelling. The question then is, why should we travel? What would be the point in that?

We are getting some comments from Canadians who are aware of what's going on and have expressed a view. Chair, I sent this back and I asked my staff to go through it to make sure I was only reading things that are relevant to the issue of travel, which speaks directly to my motion, and to ensure that I don't speak at all to the content of the bill. I'm sincere when I hope we will, and you'll be the arbitrator of that, but I'm just letting you know ahead of time that I have great reliance on the crackerjack staff we have, and on the fact that you are a fair-minded person. This should go well, so let's try it.

• (1640)

Why cross-country hearings? Jamie Biggar said, "Because Canadians deserve to have a say in a law that impacts our basic democratic rights." I realize that Jamie is repeating something I said, but it would seem to me that hearing that message from Canadians is very different from hearing it from me.

I already read Emma Pullman's comments.

Glenn Denholm said:

Because in this day and age the people should have MORE and not REDUCED access to what is going on behind closed doors.

Rodrigo NoEnbridge Samayoa said:

Because voting is the most basic right in a democracy. It is one of the elements that separates Canada from a dictatorship. Many people have died so we can have this right, it is our responsibility to protect this right. That is why all Canadians should have a say in what Harpers suppression bill contains. Please approve the country-wide hearings!

Why cross-country hearings?

James Coccola said, "Because the public should be included in something as important as changes to the election act". James gets it.

Sheila Strickland, on why we need cross-country hearings, said:

Because no one has asked for citizens' opinions! Again! Harper thinks he can just ram through massive changes to how our country functions...last time I checked, that's not how democracy worked.

Helen Brown said:

This change to our election laws needs to be aired and understood: we remain Canadians, so far, and we should be encouraging all democratic rights, such as the right to peaceful assembly, such as the right to vote: I have had to help handicapped people at polling stations, and the elderly. Information about where to vote should not be in the hands of the incumbent only. Canadians are not aware of the rationale behind this move by the Conservatives, nor are they aware of the implications. This needs cross-country hearings.

Lisa M. Williamson said, in part: “Cross-country hearings will encourage Canadians to get involved in politics and to go to the polls to have their opinions heard.”

Michael Cowtan said:

We do not want to exclude any person from exercising their democratic right to vote in a free society. The point of this law is to exclude the poor and anyone else who does not vote conservative, and I deserve the right to voice this opinion in public at a public hearing

• (1645)

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, I'm going to stop you about there. You have a great example of e-mails that have come in to you and you certainly can share them with the committee and, if you like, you can even send them through the chair as briefs.

But while no one else is having the opportunity to speak to the motion and therefore read their e-mails, I'm going to stop you after a fairly good sample of what you've shared.

Mr. David Christopherson: With respect—

The Chair: I thought we might get that term.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm trying. I am trying, Chair.

Again, the fact that somebody has to wait for their turn to say what they think is important, including reading comments from other Canadians who share their opinion, shouldn't in any way impact on my right. The rules don't say that my rights start to peter out as time goes on.

If I had the right to read them at one point, the fact that it makes other people wait, well we all wait our turn.

The Chair: I understand what your thinking is, but I've told you what I'd like you to do.

We'll go with that relevance piece again that I gave you full distance to read a number of them and as they all start to say very similar things, then I get to relevance and say to carry on with something else on the motion.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chairman, on a point of order.

I'm seeking to understand if not your ruling, your admonition of my colleague.

What's exciting here, and what the committee should be taking note of, is that we seem to have awoken a sleeping giant, people across the country who care about democracy, and we've mobilized—or in fact, they themselves are mobilizing with a voice to cry out.

Now, you'd think—

The Chair: Mr. Martin, do you have a point of order? Give it to me.

Mr. Pat Martin: The point of order is that I'm questioning and challenging, I suppose, your admonition of my—

The Chair: Relevance on what Mr. Christopherson was saying?

Mr. Pat Martin: Exactly, because if anything, we should be pleased and excited that Canadians are taking note of their democratic electoral system as individuals.

The Chair: Thank you for your input on my vigilance.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, it's input. I'm not satisfied that you're asking him to stop reading those. I think we're interested. I think the public that is tuned in and watching is interested to hear what their fellow citizens are saying about this, and it should be encouraging—

The Chair: I suggested that we have a number of them read into the record and as they started to get much more similar and similar, I suggested, since we're here discussing a motion, not the piece of legislation you'd like to discuss—

Mr. Pat Martin: No, no, the motion right here.

The Chair: —but the motion.

Mr. Pat Martin: I have it right in front of me, and with all due respect, I disagree with the way that you are—

The Chair: Mr. Martin, did you just interrupt me while I'm trying to tell you what I've done here?

Mr. Pat Martin: Respectfully, yes.

The Chair: Okay. You have the floor. If you want to talk over top of me, go for it.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, no, I'm not trying to talk over top of you, sir. I'm just trying to understand, I suppose, your reasoning, because we have a stack of—

The Chair: Yet here I was giving you my reasoning, but go ahead.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, you first. I insist. It's very Canadian that we're trying to out-polite each other.

The Chair: I had already ruled that after a number of these e-mails were read, we reached the point of relevance, that they were going to say similar things about the reason Mr. Christopherson had brought them forward. That was about travel of the committee. That's part of his motion, so I understand where he came from on it. It's very relevant, until you get to 10 or 12 of them, and then it starts to be repetitious and not relevant. I'll go from there.

Mr. Christopherson, back to your motion.

• (1650)

Mr. David Christopherson: I was trying to do a quick count to see if I had read 10 or 12.

The Chair: It sure seemed like 10 or 12.

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, how it seemed. It's close.

I respectfully disagree, but I also respectfully accept your ruling and will move on.

In my motion I specifically spell out a number of regions that we think are priorities for us to consider, and not just because of the impact of the bill on them, although that's clearly a big part of it, but part of it is also just the element of fairness.

The first element of fairness is whether Canadians are going to get their say in the places where they live, yes or no. If the answer is yes, then we want to make sure that we're fair-minded, that we don't do everything in one....

Say we did five meetings and held them all in one province; that wouldn't be acceptable. The motion clearly spells out the different regions, and not only spells out Ontario, but northern Ontario separately. Being an Ontarian yourself, Chair, you would know that northern Ontario often feels—

An hon. member: —terribly poor.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes.

They should almost think about being a separate province themselves, because they feel that there's such unfairness. So we've included them separately.

Since we also talked about first nations and aboriginal peoples and the impact there and about having their representatives come as witnesses, when I make reference in my second point to travelling... Even though I'm from Ontario, the north is not just northern Ontario, but quite frankly, it more or less begins at the northern point of northern Ontario. Then we start getting into northern Canada, really, and you're still not yet at the Arctic, which then takes you to the top of Canada.

I'm going out on a limb here—I haven't checked this with my folks—but it would seem to me that a logical place for us to go, especially since the only direct flight there is from Ottawa, would be to the territory of Nunavut, and to Iqaluit.

We did a little research, because we proposed the travel here, and we find that there are daily flights that leave at 9:15 a.m., and arrive at 12:25. Then they have a return flight at 12:45, which arrives back in Ottawa at 3:55 p.m. I mention this for two reasons. One is to show that it is not only possible to get there, but two, that it's easy, and the easiest place in all of Canada to get to Iqaluit from is Ottawa. It's a perfect launch point.

Now for those who haven't been there—

Mr. Peter Braid: I've been there.

Mr. David Christopherson: Have you been there, Mr. Braid? It's beautiful, isn't it? Everybody should get a chance, because it really—no, I'm sincere—speaks to another part of Canada that we normally don't think of when we're in the south.

The reason I picked up on the comment from Mr. Braid was that it could very well be that some people who haven't been there would wonder where we would stay, since it's way up in the north. This is more the sort of thing you would think of when you start getting up to Pond Inlet and Resolute Bay, where I've been, as I know others here have.

The nice thing about Iqaluit, among the beautiful things that are there, is that the accommodations are excellent, and—I know this

will really matter to the government—it is secure, so that when those evil Canadians whom they're worried about come out, if they should do so, with those signs that say “Down with Conservatives”, we can assure the government—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I know that this is quite repetitious.

• (1655)

The Chair: Yes, I was going to say it; I thought it myself.

Mr. Christopherson—

Mr. David Christopherson: No, that's fine. I have to say I much prefer it coming from a government member rather than the chair. Anyway, that's just that.

The fact remains that there is excellent accommodation there, as Mr. Braid will testify. I was very comfortable. I've been there two or three times. The Frobisher Inn is one of the places we go to when we travel there. They have five meeting rooms. They have a theatre capacity of 272, a banquet capacity of 120, and a reception capacity of 272. They have everything we would need in terms of infrastructure to support a House of Commons standing committee.

It's easy to get there. It represents an important part of Canadian life. It's secure. It speaks to one of the groups we're concerned about who may be losing rights here, and that is northern Canadians. That's before we even get into aboriginal peoples, first nations people, the Inuit, who would have an opportunity to....

This is the thing, Chair. I haven't gone this far before in specificity, but were we there right now, for instance, in the Frobisher Inn, we would have people who may or may not be national figures, but they are people in Iqaluit who understand the city, who understand the election process and want to describe to us how different voting is there and be able to say, “You passed the community centre when you came by; most people vote there, but we have this kind of problem; if there's this kind of weather, there's that problem; when poll clerks don't show up, this is the problem we have; and the problems are different from the problems that you in the south face.”

Being there is not necessarily about identifying people per se in Iqaluit whom we want to hear from and that's why we have to go there, which is what the government was suggesting I was trying to imply in my motion. That's not the case. There could very well be experts who are renowned—world-renowned, nationally, internationally—who would come. More specifically, if we travelled to communities like that, the specific purpose would be, yes, to ask what they think about the rules overall, which affect us all the same way no matter where we live, but for them to talk to us about how specifically these changes either make things worse or don't address an existing problem that still remains, one that needs to be explained and is best explained by seeing it and feeling it.

If you've never been to Iqaluit or further north than that, then I say with the greatest of respect that you really don't have a feel for how some of our fellow Canadians live and what their day-to-day life is like. I'm not at all suggesting that it is in any way more or less than our life in cities, but it's different. That's why we included things such as saying that we should go to different parts of Canada and why we mentioned not just northern Ontario but the north. That's what we meant by the north.

This makes some of my fellow Ontarians crazy, but it depends where you live. It's interesting, if I may speak just a little on geography—and you'll know this—that those of us who live in southern Ontario say in the summertime, “We're going north”, when we're going no further than Parry Sound or at the furthest North Bay. I'll never forget my colleagues at Queen's Park, when the Conservatives rejigged things a little bit and included North Bay in the north. There were an awful lot of Ontarians who were very upset. Then they brought it down—I could be wrong on this—all the way to Parry Sound and said, “This is northern Ontario”. Well, let me tell you, the people in Wawa, Timiskaming, and along the James Bay coast were not impressed.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, I'm wondering what the relevance of this is.

• (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, but I'll go back to Mr. Christopherson.

Maybe you can help answer the question by what you say next.

Mr. David Christopherson: I thought it was interesting.

The Chair: I was on it.

Mr. David Christopherson: I can't seem to win. If I'm boring, they get upset. If I'm interesting, they get upset. If I tell jokes, they get upset. I just plain upset people. That's the problem over there. They're just angry.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chairman, I'm still a little unclear. I'm not challenging you on the relevance point that Tom just raised, but I'm a little unclear regarding a previous relevance motion. It's very important for me, because we're tracking these things as well. You thought it was repetitious that Mr. Christopherson mentioned there may be gatherings of protestors with signs such as “Stop Harper”, “Down with the Conservatives”, etc. Was it the content of the protest signs specifically that you objected to?

The Chair: Mr. Martin, had you been here at all of our meetings, you would have known by the phrases that Mr. Christopherson had shared much of that with us before.

Mr. Pat Martin: Was it “Stop Harper” specifically? Was that the term he used over and over again?

The Chair: It was the phrases that Mr. Christopherson used over and over. Whether he repeats what's on the sign or what would happen with the sign, it's still repetition.

Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Christopherson, we're back to you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair.

We were looking for the conclusion of something, and I confess I lost my train of thought, and a lot hinged on it. Can you help me?

The Chair: We were in the north.

Mr. David Christopherson: Right. I was in the north.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: It was totally irrelevant, but we were up there.

Mr. David Christopherson: I would go on to say that a similar argument can be made when we talk about Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. We'll use the extremes to make some points. We are talking again about a whole other world, only this time we didn't travel thousands of kilometres away from our urban setting. In fact, this exists in one of the most beautiful cities not just in Canada, but in the world, one of our largest and most important cities.

Again, Mr. Chair, at the risk of repetition, it's the same argument that applies to people on the west coast as it does on the north coast, that is, to be able to hear from people who live there and from representatives of community groups who are there on the ground. We may all think we can imagine what certain aspects of life are like for those who are living on the streets. Much like the beauty of our north, you really have to see it to understand it. I don't imagine those would be easy hearings, but it's the opportunity for those representatives to point out again in the community, in the neighbourhoods, why this bill either works for them or it doesn't.

This could be the case too when we get out there, that there are still a lot of unresolved problems. Some of those issues have been raised by the Chief Electoral Officer. We studied them and thought about them and they didn't find their way into the bill. For purposes of doing a thorough and adequate study of a piece of legislation, we need to hear from citizens not only on how the bill will affect them negatively, but how they have negative aspects in their experience of voting in Canada as it is, and how the bill is not addressing those concerns.

Not everything will be geography-specific. I accept that. There are some parts of the bill and our voting system that are uniform across the board, for instance, the actual ballot. Even in the voting areas those little cardboard screens are set up. That's all pretty uniform at the end of the day. There are some exceptions, but for the most part, that part would be uniform. The process of being identified as a citizen, of having the ability to present yourself, to understand where you should go and when, and then to go about the process of elections....

It's interesting, when we do international election observation missions, we study every single piece of the process. Oftentimes we'll identify—and this is relevant, Mr. Chair, I'm not trying to play a game here—someone as they come through the door and we'll stay with them all the way through the process. If they have any problems, we may even talk to them afterwards, particularly if it was about their ID. Or if they were rejected from voting, then we would go and talk to them. Again, I've said this, and I won't say it a lot, but when you get out into the villages of a lot of the emerging democracies, you start to realize the challenge to their democracy just because of their geography and infrastructure, or in particular, lack thereof. We would like to see that same respect paid to Canadians.

There aren't many in terms of numbers because we are one of the most urbanized cities in the world—

A voice: That's countries.

Mr. David Christopherson: Countries, thank you. We are one of the most urbanized countries in the world, but—

An hon. member: They thought you weren't listening.

• (1705)

The Chair: It goes without saying. Cities are urbanized.

Mr. Pat Martin: It's redundant.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, no, come on. That can't count against me. Forgive.

The point is really not a joke, and the point is to allow people an opportunity to explain.

In the north, it would be, “Well here's the challenge that we have. You can see the snow, and you can see the frost.” In the case of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, the issues are going to be very different, but they're just as challenging, and if it leaves those Canadian citizens without the right to vote, that is as big a crime, and a shame, and a blight against our democracy. Anybody else in this country, whether it's a former prime minister, a former governor general, or the richest person in the country, their vote counts absolutely no more than that of any other Canadian who finds their way to a polling station and casts a ballot.

What's happening here is we're not showing them the respect they deserve, because if we did, the government would at least have agreed to negotiate a certain number. I won't throw a number out there, but it would be somewhere between none and what we've asked for. It would be a negotiated number.

Would it still satisfy all the concerns that I'm raising? No, Chair, no, but, it would be fairer. The government doesn't understand this so well, but fairness usually dictates that you give a little, we give a little, and we can both live with the decision. That's what's missing here. It didn't happen with the.... To show that kind of respect to other parliamentarians; that respect was not shown to Elections Canada, and by virtue of refusing to support my motion, they're not showing that respect to Canadians.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order again on repetition, Chair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Chair, may I ask what is your ruling on it? You got the editorial comments from Mr. Lukiwski. He brought it to your attention, and I really can't tell if you're making a ruling that he is being irrelevant or repetitious.

The Chair: Stay with us, Mr. Martin. If I make a ruling, I'll be the first one to tell you.

I'm simply suggesting that I heard from Mr. Lukiwski that he felt that was repetition. I said, thank you, and I asked Mr. Christopherson to continue.

Mr. Pat Martin: I see.

The Chair: Had it been a ruling of repetition, I would have said, “Excuse me, Mr. Christopherson, I agree with the member for Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre. That was repetition.”

Mr. Pat Martin: Fair enough, thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, it's back to you.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I guess there's no rule about repetitive points of order.

Mr. Pat Martin: Or irrelevant points of order.

The Chair: Yes, I can rule on that too.

Mr. David Christopherson: Can I try it?

The Chair: What about redundant?

Mr. David Christopherson: It's not like it's going to get me anywhere.

The Chair: Probably not.

Mr. David Christopherson: All right. If I'm that stuck, I may come to you just for you to tell me no.

To continue, I mentioned some of the groups that we would have. I started talking about some of their qualifications. I did not try to read, much more than the first time I did, the entire bio, but I do want to come back, Chair, to the importance of the very first bullet point. The first bullet point we make in our motion is that we “hear witnesses from, but not limited to,” and I gave an example.

If I may, one of those experts would be the Canadian Mental Health Association. Mr. Peter Coleridge is the national CEO. He is also a special adviser to the global economic round table on mental health and addiction, a founding member of the Canadian Executive Council on Addictions, and he has served in many other places in the community sector. He is somebody who can bring some expertise and relevance and put in front of us the situation for what may be not a huge percentage of the population, and we grant that.

For the most part, Chair, when we pass rules, I think most of us are trying to think of what is the best rule for the majority of people and that doesn't hurt anyone. We try to make it as broad as we can. That's why it's important that we start to be more aware of what's at stake. If someone has a mental illness, does that mean they shouldn't be allowed to vote? I'd be shocked if anybody in this room said yes, because I don't think that's the case at all, but if we accept that especially with mental illness....

Very few of us in this room haven't had mental illness affect our families. There are probably a lot of tragic stories right here in this room alone about what some of our families and family members have faced when it comes to mental health and addiction issues.

The point we're making, Chair, is that we could be a lot more sensitive to the voting rights of all Canadians if we had a process that let everybody participate. That's why my motion speaks to the kind of witnesses. That's why I'm taking the time to underscore why we think those witnesses would make a difference, and why it matters.

You know what? It only matters if you really, really, really believe that everybody is equal, not as a throwaway, not as a slogan, but if you honestly believe that every citizen is equal and we accept that having our franchise, the right to vote, that precious vote....

Here, as members of the House, the most precious thing we have is when we go into that House and cast our vote. That goes for here at committee too, but in the House, that precious vote, it's everything.

There are serious concerns—I'll leave it at concerns, because I don't want to start talking about the bill—that certain Canadians will have their right to vote lost, taken from them, or not returned to them by virtue of fixing a bill. The witnesses are to ensure that we don't forget them.

You know, Chair, a clear majority rules. Around here, a clear majority is 50% plus one. That's how we make laws. That's how we get things done in committee. We make decisions that way. A clear majority is 50% plus one. That's what makes laws in this country.

The vast majority of people live in urban settings, and the vast majority probably have no particular problem if they're determined to vote. But that, as a standard, is about as low as you could possibly have.

• (1710)

The idea of reforming our election law supposedly is to improve it. We asked for the witnesses in our motion because we believe they will help us understand the implications of Bill C-23 on the right of Canadians to vote. That's why having the Canadian Mental Health Association, we believe, is an important part of our hearings and therefore an important part of my motion.

Further to that, my motion says that we should be asking for witnesses from groups representing youth advocates and students. There's more than one. This is not easy. Remember, this is all complex. It's difficult, it's expensive, and it's slow, but I say again, if Canada was easy, everybody would have one.

Not only do we want, for instance, student groups and youth representatives and advocates, but they have different groups, and

the beauty of democracy is sometimes they have a different view of things. We can get into different subsets of representatives representing Canadians, which is why democracy is not known for its speed.

We can move quickly. We did last night on the Ukrainian question. There was a political will that; notwithstanding the nonsense of last week, we wanted to send a message of unity from our country to theirs, and we did it. The hard work was done in the background by the House leaders and their staff, negotiating the words, but the actual political process was done in a blink: unanimous consent, motion, carried, passed. There's the message.

One of the groups, Chair, that we would think of to put on our list of invitees, if the committee agrees to hear witnesses...because we don't have a motion right now. There's no motion saying we want witnesses. That's why I'm going out of my way to underscore the importance of hearing from witnesses, and as we all know, I'm gaining ground. Remember, I do have Mr. Lukiwski on side with that notion of my motion, so I'm on a roll.

One of the groups we would want to hear from as expert witnesses, as mentioned in my motion—not the bill, my motion—is the Canadian Federation of Students. The national chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students is Jessica McCormick. She represents over 600,000 college and university students. She also served, prior to—a great experience—as the national deputy chairperson and as the chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students in Newfoundland and Labrador. Again, this is someone with a great deal of expertise. I'm noticing that she also has an undergraduate degree. It's an undergraduate degree in political science and English at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she was the executive director of external affairs, communications, and research of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Students' Union.

Again, she is somebody who has a practical hands-on experience with democracy, albeit at university. I didn't attend university, but I suspect by that age and that level of intelligence, those elections are pretty sophisticated because they probably have a whole campus full of Philadelphia lawyers who are ready to tell everybody why it was wrong.

So they have some experience. The testimony they would give, Chair, would not be just related to their role as the head of this organization, but they would also be able to weave through that their personal experience in running and following election rules, and hopefully trying to make election rules that are fair for everyone, which, unless I misread the rhetoric of the government, is supposedly what they want. But of course their words are not lining up with their actions on that one.

Further, Chair, we made reference in my motion, in the first part, about Canadians with disabilities. Again, this is where democracy can get complex. You either believe everybody matters or you don't. It's either a throwaway line that everybody matters, or they don't.

• (1715)

I don't know if the members opposite have given any thought to where they're going to be in history on this, but I suspect not. They're probably not looking much further than the next election; that's why they're supporting rules that jig the election in their favour. The fact is that all of this eventually will be looked at in a historical context, and when it is, the government's not going to be on the side of the good guys.

This is ugly stuff. Even accusations that are supportable that people are losing their vote, that the Chief Electoral Officer is being handcuffed.... Maybe the members don't care. I would have thought they'd care a little about their legacy, especially on big questions, but when that dark period of Canadian democracy is looked at—and I'm referring to *maintenant*—they're going to be culpable. Their names will be listed. The votes will be there forever.

It's not to say they don't have the right to pass laws—

• (1720)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order. He's outdone himself because he's now reaching irrelevance and repetition, but nonetheless....

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Christopherson, please carry on.

Mr. David Christopherson: I graduated. I did both at the same time. That should be a super point of order for something like that, don't you think?

An hon. member: I know, I know.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: In one sentence.

The Chair: Follow that, Mr. Scott. A super point of order. Live under that pressure.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Chair, quite honestly, this probably will not appear as a super point of order, but I had to leave the room and I'm back. I wanted to be sure that something I had to do is being dealt with consistently, so I had to leave the room because I was substituted.

I want to make sure that nobody sitting at the bench has been substituted for anybody else. Is that correct?

The Chair: I'll ask the clerk. The clerk takes care of the substitutions, but I've seen lots of paper come back and forth, Mr. Scott. As per normal, I would suggest that's the case.

Mr. Craig Scott: I want to make sure. Can you confirm, Clerk, that nobody sitting at the table has been substituted out?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mrs. Marie-France Renaud): The members of the committee who are sitting at the table are the ones who are the members. If a substitute is subbed in, the official member isn't here.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you. That's all I wanted to know.

The Chair: You've been given some leeway with that. I'd remind you that when your leader was here today he was not subbed in, but I did allow him to speak, so I'll give some leeway both ways.

Mr. Craig Scott: I should also clarify, I was not asked to leave; I was informed of the rule, so I did leave.

The Chair: Right, okay.

Super, back to where we were.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair, I was talking about the importance of all individuals and about why we worded our motion the way we worded it. We did specifically point out that we wanted to have representatives here, and I just want to get the wording right, "groups representing persons with disabilities".

Excuse me, I can't imagine why my throat's not clear.

The Chair: I can't imagine.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm expecting a motion at any time to remove water, however.

To the point—

Mr. Scott Reid: To supplement it with something else—

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm not stopping you.

To the point, Chair, we would see a group like the Council of Canadians with Disabilities as a primary, specific group we might look to. They are a national human rights organization of people with disabilities working for an inclusive and accessible Canada. You could almost put those words into another sentence about what Canadians want in their election laws.

The priorities of the Council of Canadians with Disabilities include disability-related supports, poverty alleviation, increased employment for persons with disabilities, promotion of human rights in Canada—the right to vote is that—ratification and implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I'll just read one or two, Chair. I won't read the whole thing.

They believe, in terms of citizenship, that people with disabilities "have the same rights and responsibilities as Canadians without disabilities." My first position ever, when I was 22 years old, I was elected chair of the health and safety committee in the little shop that I worked in. That's when it became clear to me with health and safety, if you don't know your rights, you don't have any.

In terms of citizenship, they're specifically concerned that "socially made barriers, which prevent participation and discriminate against people with disabilities must be eliminated." Again, it would be obvious things like making sure that polling stations are accessible.

Chair, the other thing I wanted to say about learning early on is that all of us are only temporarily able-bodied. Every one of us will be disabled at some point. The only issue is whether it happens sooner or later. That's the only difference. There aren't just the barriers that we tend to think of, those of us who are able-bodied. There is a whole host of challenges that people with disabilities face in Canada. Our motion is here to ensure that the issues that would affect those fellow Canadians are taken into account when we look at Bill C-23.

Do I know what all those issues are? No, but then I doubt anybody else around the table does either. That's why we would invite them. We would invite them as expert witnesses representing a segment of our population, to ensure that those of us entrusted with passing the laws of our nation understand the implications of either changing the law or not adequately addressing challenges and problems that already exist.

That's why we have included in my motion various groups and organizations and points of view to ensure that we get as good a bill as possible. Would it be perfect? No.

As I said, I'm already aware of some clauses and things that we agreed to in our work a couple of years ago that I would already be looking at differently. That comes from experience. That's evolution of thought. Also, there's just having others look at it and give their opinion. That's why you have consultations.

That's why we were so proud to see a country like New Zealand having all kinds of consultation and that it wasn't being led by a political party. It was led by their version of our Elections Canada. That's how much they trust them. They let them lead the consultation. They let them produce the discussion paper and then they went back out again and said, "What do you think about what we've said about what you said?" This was before it even got to the politicians. We are so far away from anything like that.

•(1725)

In our motion we speak of groups that have been active in our society. In fact the actual words, Chair, that we used were "as well as specific groups which have been active in society on election rules."

The first one we mentioned was Fair Vote Canada. Fair Vote Canada is a grassroots, multi-partisan citizens campaign for voting system reform. They promote the introduction of an element of proportional representation into elections for all levels of government and throughout civil society. The position of our party is that we should be moving to a proportional representation system as a further refinement of good democratic governance, but that's for another day.

It is worth saying, Chair, that one of the criticisms of proportional representation is that it doesn't usually lead to any one party receiving a majority control of the House, and that's seen as a problem. Yet the best example I can point to in the decade that I've been here—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Chair, I don't see the relevancy. I didn't think this was a debate on proportional representation.

•(1730)

The Chair: I'll give you that one.

Mr. Christopherson, I almost forgot your name after all this time, please try to stay relevant.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm hurt, Joe. You hurt me a lot here today, man.

The Chair: I try not to.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

The Chair: Mr. Scott, on another point of order.

Mr. Craig Scott: No, it's on the same point of order, if that's possible.

The Chair: Okay, sure. We'll number them from now on.

Mr. Craig Scott: I just wanted to say that you may want to go back to your concern that this has been mentioned before. I don't remember it today though. But the question of proportional representation goes to creating a House of Commons with more of a cooperative ethic. The whole point is that a bill like this would not have gotten here without a different kind of process. What we're trying to do is recreate that process by going out to Canadians.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'll come to that.

The Chair: I understand your thoughts on the bill, but we're still on Mr. Christopherson's motion.

Mr. Craig Scott: Keep in mind that what we're doing here is seeking to create a more cooperative production of a bill through a process. That's the connection I think he's trying to make.

The Chair: I understand, but I bet Fair Vote Canada is in the phone book and having him read the phone book would not be relevant.

Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Really, I can't read the phone book? Now what am I going to do?

The Chair: I did not mean to give you any ideas.

Mr. David Christopherson: If it was the Ontario phone book, would that help? You're an Ontario MP.

If I may, I'll just wrap up that part of my thinking on this now.

I'll just mention one more, Chair, and then I'll shift gears again.

The Chair: We'll all put our seat belts on and be ready.

Mr. David Christopherson: I have no doubt.

I was saying that we want to have experts in the field of human rights and of election laws, and I mentioned some of the groups that are focused on that, which we would want to call. Again, as I mentioned with the students and other groups, there's not a uniform position held by everyone. They have differences of opinion in terms of different questions that are before us. That's all healthy. It complicates things and slows things down, but it's healthy, because it's another opinion. All opinions, especially on this bill, are equal and valid and important.

We would probably be looking at bringing in a group like ACORN, which is an independent national organization of low- and moderate-income families with almost 60,000 members in over 20 neighbourhoods and chapters across eight cities. I have just one sentence, Chair, and then I'm done with this. They state, "We believe that social and economic justice can best be achieved with a national active membership who are invested in their organization and focused on building power for change."

Again, that would be the kind of group we would want to hear from to give us expert citizen opinion and input into what is arguably one of the most important pieces of legislation that any of us will be privileged to have a say on.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, on a point of order, and I'll just say right off the top that this is probably not a legitimate point of order, but I say this primarily for the benefit of David, if you or members wish to suspend for five minutes just for a quick health break, that's fine.

I'm just saying that because, David, I know on a couple of occasions, you have—

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm good. That's very respectful. Thank you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: If it gets to a point where anybody needs to use the facilities, we're fine with that, as long as it's a suspension and only for a short period of time.

Mr. David Christopherson: Great. Excellent. There's 12 hours there. Okay. Thanks.

Mr. Scott Reid: It's all depends.

Mr. David Christopherson: We shall see what we shall see.

An hon. member: Depends....

Mr. David Christopherson: They're distracting me, Chair, from staying focused on the things that you want me to stay focused on.

The Chair: I know they did that, yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: I said to you that I would shift gears, and I'll do that just to try to keep it as fascinating as it has been.

The Chair: Yes, it has been.

Mr. David Christopherson: Just riveting, no doubt.

Get your pen ready. I had mentioned earlier, Bill C-15.

• (1735)

The Chair: There's no more room for a check mark beside Bill C-15.

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm pretty much done on Bill C-15, even by my own reckoning, so I accept that.

I was just saying that like Bill C-15, when I was raising its important relevance and you were acknowledging that relevance, for the most for my comments, I was doing so because it showed an example of how my motion is in order and is consistent with the way that we have conducted and do conduct business.

It may not be usual, but it is really not unusual. If I may, Chair, another example of that, which I have not yet mentioned.... The headline is, "Cross-Canada hearings of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration: An opportunity for your voice to be heard". I mention that headline, not because it was in a newspaper which is written by an editor, but rather it's the committee's release. It's their headline. They wrote it. Yes, it says, "An opportunity for your voice to be heard". Wouldn't it be nice to see that underneath PROC studying your election laws, asking that you be given an opportunity for your voice to be heard? It did happen.

This was on December 20, 2004, so about six months after the class of 2004 arrived. You were there, David. I was. The late great Jack Layton was the class of 2004.

It reads:

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration will be traveling to the following cities in March and April 2005: St. John's, Halifax, Charlottetown, Fredericton, Quebec, Montreal, Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, Edmonton, Vancouver and Victoria.

We didn't even ask for that much in our motion.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Maybe we should.

Mr. David Christopherson: Maybe we should have.

It certainly does speak to the fact that when we make the case that my motion is not an unusual way for us to do business, we can back that up. How nice would.... How many cities were there, just so we can be accurate? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen.

Fourteen cities: one would actually start to believe there was a desire to hear from Canadians. As strange as it sounds, Chair, I look at this and I think, hmm, what could it possibly mean? I think what it means is that they were bringing in a new citizenship act, so it crossed the minds of the members of that committee—hmm, hmm, and probably more hmm—that maybe they should go out and ask Canadians what they thought about an immigration law that affects everybody.

Why can't we think that way? That's the point of our motion. That's why my motion is here. That's why all of this is going on: we think that Canadians should be given an opportunity, particularly when there's so much potential controversy. I won't get into the bill itself, but the fact is there are leading Canadians and ordinary Canadians, if I can use that term, who are looking at this, and they're troubled and they have concerns. They're not asking for much. They'd like the committee to treat them with respect.

I would make the case that the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, on December 20, 2004, really did want to hear what Canadians thought. It's hard to look at that and think otherwise.

Conversely, it's hard for Canadians to look at the process that we're involved in right now and not draw the conclusion that they don't want to hear from anybody. They don't want to consider alternate points of view. They don't want to hear some other thinking about something they've already decided. They want their law and they're prepared to take whatever political heat it takes to bring it in, so that they can get a fix in the next election before it even happens.

I congratulate the members of that committee. I don't know who they were, but the members of that committee at that time are to be commended for caring enough about the opinion of Canadians such that they would actually travel.

Now, it's fair, because the government has raised their concerns about a circus and a gong show and such when we talked about my second bullet point, which is travel. That's what they say. That's one of the reasons I haven't yet convinced anybody on the second point. I got one member on the first point, but I still have two other points.

Is he getting shaky on me? I'm disappointed. I thought he was a man of commitment.

• (1740)

Mr. Scott Reid: Another hour or two of convincing might bring him over, though.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, okay. Good. That fits perfectly with my plan. That's perfect.

It means that I still have two more bullet points and the whole crowd over there, although I don't need them all, do I? I just need enough to get a majority.

Mr. Scott Reid: You also need to actually have a vote on your motion. I'm just pointing that out. You can't do that while you're talking.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's fine, but I'm not going to allow a vote at this point when I'm still fighting to win, because right now I'm going to lose. As soon as I stop talking, I'll lose, so I have to keep talking.

I'll end this part of it by saying again that's the kind of message Canadians want to see. That's why my motion is here. That's why it says we should travel, so that Canadians would believe that their lawmakers actually want to hear from the people who are ruled by the law. That committee did it. Congratulations to them. This committee won't. Shame on them.

Next, I had made reference, but I hadn't talked much about.... Again, Mr. Chair, I'm underscoring how Canada, the House of Commons, and governments of the day have looked at democracy and compared it to what we consider to be the lack of democracy in this process, and hence my motion. That's why we're continuing as much as possible to convince members by underscoring the strengths of the arguments that are represented by the motion.

I made reference to, but did not talk about it at any length, the foreign affairs committee that travelled to Ukraine in the spring of

2012 to study democracy. That much I said, but I did not spend time talking at all about what they did. I just want to mention a couple of parts of that because my motion calls for us to travel, to call witnesses, and to have hearings.

Canadians spent probably hundreds of thousands, but certainly tens of thousands of dollars to send the foreign affairs committee all the way to Ukraine to study it. What did they do? Did they just tour around, take pictures, put together a little folio, and send it back? No. They actually spent a whole week holding public hearings every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. They had witnesses from all kinds of groups and backgrounds: political people; media about a free press; experts on democracy, history, and international affairs; and representatives from civil society. They were in three different parts of the country: Kiev—which is a beautiful city, I've been there, and it breaks my heart to see what's happening there, especially in Independence Square—Lviv, and then Kharkov. I've been to Kharkov and Donetsk. Both of them are centres of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers, and once you've been to Kiev and then the eastern part of the country, you sure get a sense of that divide.

However, I'm raising this in the context of my motion, Mr. Chair, because I want to point out that Canadians, a Canadian delegation, a Canadian committee on foreign affairs went all the way to Ukraine not just to study it, but to actually hold hearings. A Canadian delegation holding hearings with Ukrainians from all walks of life, experts and ordinary folk, to talk about their democracy, to talk about their system of elections, their system of representation. We wanted that to happen, which is why we spent all of that money, because we saw it as a contribution to the struggle in Ukraine for democracy and rule of law and human rights.

The reason I'm raising that, Mr. Chair, is that we have this incredible dichotomy of a committee here, seized of our own election reform act, refusing to travel outside Ottawa, and yet the very same government, the very same government, during this Parliament—

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I was there.

Mr. David Christopherson: In fact, you speak Russian, if I understand right.

So there was a real contribution.

My point, Chair, relative to my motion, is that they actually travelled to different cities in Ukraine to hear from Ukrainians about their elections and democracy. Here we are, with the same government, and the same majority, refusing to allow the committee that's studying Canada's democracy to go to Canadian cities and hear from Canadians. That's where we are.

• (1745)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: A point of order, Chair, on repetition.

The Chair: We have heard this story before.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's not repetition at all. I'll flag that one. That's not repetition.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I've heard you speak about Ukraine and going to Ukraine.

Mr. David Christopherson: Fair enough, and I did say that. I said specifically I wanted to talk about the fact that we sent a standing committee, one of our sister committees, all the way to Ukraine, and they travelled to different cities in Ukraine to hear from Ukrainians about their democracy. I have not mentioned the absolute ridiculousness of being here in Canada and we can't get our own committee, this seized with our democratic review, to go to our own cities. That's worth mentioning.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Actually, on the point of order, you have mentioned that before on several occasions. That was my point. It's repetitious.

The Chair: I will suggest that I've heard it before, too.

Mr. David Christopherson: Not that one. I didn't know that.

The Chair: Well, I've heard about Canadians in Ukraine.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, no, the travel of the committee.... Let's be fair. I've tried to be fair-minded.

The fact is I have not spoken about the fact that a standing committee of the House of Commons not only travelled in Canada—as I've shown with an example—but a committee went all the way to Ukraine to study Ukrainian democracy. That standing committee travelled to three different cities in Ukraine to hear from Ukrainians, but we can't get the same government to agree that we should go to the cities of Canada to ask Canadians about their democracy. That's a new point.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, but I've made it, so—

The Chair: Right, and if you say it again, it will be repetition.

Mr. David Christopherson: Then I would be in trouble, and I recognize that. But sincerely, I didn't know that. I knew they went there, and I'd made those.... I did not know that it was that bad of a comparison that not only did we send the standing committee there, they went to different cities within Ukraine to hear about the democracy, and we can't get the same right here. See, I got it in a second time.

Mr. Scott Reid: On a point of order, Chair. I would argue that if Mr. Christopherson were to discover that he had actually misread, and it was actually four cities, or five, or six, it wouldn't really constitute new information of any substantial form. I mean, just the numbers don't matter in the same way that it doesn't matter whether they met in small meeting rooms or big ones, what the colour of the walls were, whether it was Tuesday or Wednesday, and so on. This is not genuine new information.

In terms of guiding members like myself in trying to determine how we would like to vote on his motion, it's just a kind of space filler, a time filler.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Reid. I understand, and I've been as generous as I can be, and will continue to try to be as fair as I can be on both sides of this repetitious issue, repetition and relevance.

Mr. Craig Scott: On a point of order.

The Chair: Sure, I'll give you a chance as soon as I'm finished.

I keep hearing it. I have heard repetition, and I try to point it out to Mr. Christopherson when it happens. At some point, the chair will have to make a ruling on it, but at this point, I am going to suggest that I'll just keep warning Mr. Christopherson to try to stay, as he puts it, inside the borders and colour inside the lines.

Mr. Scott, can you add to that?

• (1750)

Mr. Craig Scott: Yes, just very quickly. What I heard coming from my colleague, from Scott, was more of a concern about relevance and not so much repetition, because he gave examples of new information that wouldn't necessarily add much.

What I would say is that my colleague is doing a very good job of trying to show the kinds of efforts this other committee went to, why it was important in one context, and therefore why we should be considering something very similar now. I would say that the frame he was putting it in was extremely new.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Christopherson, we've been inside that frame now.

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, with more focus on it than I thought I'd be able to swing, so I appreciate the interventions all around.

For the record, I did not know they travelled to different cities. That's pretty pertinent, given the motion that I have in front of us.

Mr. Scott Reid: I believe that's not challenging the sincerity of your—

Mr. David Christopherson: No, but given that one of our key things is travel, it's a relevant point to raise, I think, when you look at the motion in front of us, that they actually travelled. When they went to Ukraine to study democracy, they travelled. When we're doing Canada's democracy, we don't travel. That's the problem. But I will move on.

I would like to move to another example of how to do this back in Canada. In Quebec, the second largest province in our nation, they looked at—guess what?—a draft bill replacing their elections act. It sounds familiar. But what they did was a little different. It was interesting; they had the assistance of eight citizens randomly chosen after a public call, nine MLAs on the commission, and they began their work with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Imagine that; imagine the starting point being the Chief Electoral Officer. What a concept. But that's exactly what they did. Then they put out a call asking people for their opinions. During the general consultation, 374 briefs were transmitted, and 1,747 people took part in the online consultation.

By the way, in terms of timeframes, Chair, this would be November 1, 2005, so nine years ago. That's a pretty short period of time given the history of the country.

As well, 6,200 paper copies of the information booklet were sent out in French or English to citizens who requested it, and 379 groups and individuals appeared during the public hearings at the National Assembly and—wait for it—across Quebec. There we go again with all these crazy people taking the notion of letting people have a say about their election law to incredible extremes, such as actually taking the committee there.

I think the rest of this piece will get me in trouble, so I won't go there.

Speaking of reviewing and talking about the different component parts of Canada, I made some reference to New Zealand and talked about how they did things. This is kind of shocking as well. The Portfolio Committee on Justice, Legal Affairs, Constitutional and Parliamentary Affairs of Zimbabwe held public hearings beginning on September 12, 2011, in 12 cities. That's Zimbabwe.

By the way, what is it with the Zs today? New Zealand, Zimbabwe: we have Zs everywhere. I don't know whether that's the secret to it. But I mean, Zimbabwe...Canada. Zimbabwe holds public hearings to let their citizens in, and I look at all of the cities that are listed, but I figure I'll be pushing my luck if I read those, so I won't. But I will make reference to the—

• (1755)

Mr. Craig Scott: Maybe if we were called “Zanada”, that would...

Mr. David Christopherson: “Zanada”, yes; Xanadu.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Did you say Xanadu?

Mr. David Christopherson: I did.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: You old movie buff, you.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: That's what I was doing instead of going to university, I guess.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's right. Same here.

Mr. David Christopherson: Really, Zimbabwe, come on. Even they get it that you have to let your people have a say in their election laws. But until the government decides otherwise, we will persevere.

Well that's interesting. I see that now. There's another reference here, Chair. On April 26, 2005—that might be the same one and I don't want to do that; that would get me in trouble. I won't do that.

I will return, however, to.... I was mixing it up and trying to keep it interesting here, because I don't want to lose anybody.

Returning now to why it matters that we go to other cities as I mentioned in the second bullet point of my motion. I read an article into the record that announced to the people of the north that they be given an opportunity to have their say on Bill C-15, so I won't say anything I've already said. However, part of why we want to do this and why it's in my motion is we want the public engagement portion. It's important. I want again to make some reference to the local

media having an opportunity to talk about the importance of this national issue as it relates to where they live.

What I'd like to do now, consistent with what I've done so far and I have not read this, is actor the meeting. I talked about what happened with the media and what they said to the citizenry, advising them of what's going on, what was expected, saying, “Hey, come on out.” They had the event, but there's still another piece. When you're interacting with the public, often it's like dealing with the cosmos, you can only go as fast as the speed of light and you've got to leave. You go out there and then you just start going and it continues to go and go and go. The reference to *I Love Lucy* is still out there somewhere floating around. It's much the same thing when we do media and stuff, we go into a community, we do some stuff and then we leave; or even here in Ottawa when we leave and then the media continues, but what happens then is important. It's part of the process. It's part of the communicating and conveying of messaging to the population, so it's important.

So, how did that play out in the example I gave earlier? I can hear you asking that in your mind, Chair, and I'm ready to answer that question.

Northern News Services reported on February 3, 2014, just a couple of weeks ago, and I have a copy of it, saying why it's relevant, and this is why it ties to my motion:

Northerners had their chance to tell the federal government what they think of Bill C-15 on Jan. 27 and the consensus was strong opposition to eliminating regional land and water boards, and an unhappiness about the federal government's perceived failure to properly consult on the bill.

Sounds familiar.

What's interesting, when I read the one earlier, Chair, if you recall, the article mentioned the fact that one of the things they were doing was looking at eliminating the regional land and water boards. Ordinarily, you'd think when there's a good idea like that it would have a lot of support and you would read an article saying that hey, people loved it and it's a great idea. It turns out that's not the case. They didn't like it. Well, if they hadn't held the public hearings, how would you know what the public thinks?

We're in the same boat on Bill C-23. How do you know what the public thinks if you don't ask them? The article goes on to say:

“Nothing is more important than this,” said Tlicho Grand Chief Eddie Erasmus, who signed on to devolution in March 2013.

He called the bill - which will alter two of the territory's founding documents: the NWT Act and the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act — unconstitutional and said that he is prepared to stand up to the proposed legislation in whatever way he can.

• (1800)

Canada has returned to the old colonial ways of thinking they know what is best for us. They are silencing our voice. This is not the constitutional promise that was made in the Tlicho agreement.

Members of the federal Special Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development were in Yellowknife for a marathon meeting—

That we have, but that's it, that's all. They had a marathon meeting and we're having a marathon meeting, but that's it, and maybe the coffee, but that's it.

—where they heard from 33 witnesses over nine hours on Bill C-15.

I won't go into it too far, Chair, because I accept that I would be bumping up against relevancy. I appreciate your letting me read what I did, because I do believe that was relevant. Obviously, you felt the same way, but I won't push my luck with you, Chair. I will set that aside and move along.

I have some quotes here, Chair, but I want to stay consistent with your... I'm asking you straight up. Do I have any latitude at all in terms of reading comments that are coming in either to committee members here or to my leader that are relevant to what I'm talking about?

The Chair: You have read a number of those. If you read too many, we start to get beyond their relevance, because we've heard a good sampling of what's there. I would suggest you've reached that limit, as I did the last time you read some of them.

Mr. David Christopherson: And the fact that my leader isn't going to persuade you at all? No.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

On repetition alone if the e-mails are going to continue to say what we've already heard, that is, Canadians want to be heard and want public hearings, I don't care how many different ways you say it, it's still the same message.

The Chair: That was the point I made when I allowed a number the last time, and I think I'll stick with that.

Mr. David Christopherson: This is tough enough as it is. You're making it really tough.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On the other hand, Mr. Chair, if you want to read e-mails saying we don't want public hearings, that would be new information.

The Chair: Do you want to play on the minor leagues or do you want to play—

Mr. David Christopherson: Aha, I thought I was in the big leagues when I got to the big House. I've got to tell you, I saw a lot more democracy at Hamilton City Council than I'm seeing around here.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's an exaggeration.

Mr. David Christopherson: Some days, and some days I would have been the problem, so fair is fair.

All right, new stuff.

One of the government members, Michelle Rempel, there's a story here with a headline: "Public hearings 'a big delaying tactic'."

Notwithstanding the fact that we are using parliamentary procedure to try to affect bad parliamentary procedure, it's not delaying for delaying's sake. It's not an obstructionist move. If it was, I would say so. Why not? That doesn't change. I still have the floor. Nothing would change. I would be upfront and open about it, which is what I prefer. I'm sure we're all that way. But it's not. It's not just about trying to be obstructionist, because that only gets you so far as a political party if you're hoping to get good media. I mean, they are not foolish.

With the media, especially those who have been around politics and politicians for any length of time, it doesn't take too long before they start rolling their eyes and saying, "Oh, they're just grand-

standing, hoping to get a headline. There's nothing really here." That's not the case at all. We are very serious about this, which is why we have committed the time and the effort that we have so far to try to convince the government of the error of their ways. To continue to have government members take shots at what we're doing is not helpful to the government, in my view. It's really not, because those who agree with you are already there, and those who aren't sure are watching. There are impressions being developed, and Canadians may or may not agree that what's going on here is in their best interest.

If I might, Chair, I would like to also make some reference to another set of hearings that was held by the House of Commons. It was the Special Joint Committee on the Constitution of Canada. I definitely won't go too far in talking about the process, because I have made the statement, and others have too, that this is one of the most important pieces of legislation we have. We say that about a lot of things, but really, when you're talking about the fundamental process by which Canadians are given or denied the right to vote, the procedures for the actual voting, money in particular is huge. Some of those concerns that the government has made point to a bill that money talks. That's the opposite. I thought one of the best things that was ever done for democracy in Canada, and I give full marks to former prime minister Chrétien, who brought in exactly what the government undid, but the public financing was one of the best improvements to democracy that we could have.

For instance, I was in Morocco not that long ago doing an election observation. They don't have a lot of elections, and those that they do have don't necessarily meet all the standards one would hope they would meet, but you know what? One of the first things they guaranteed was that there was public financing for all the parties so that money didn't skew the field. Morocco: a monarchy has a better sense of democracy than we do. It's going to take so long to bring that back, and it's a shame. It was an easy one for the Conservatives to go after, and no one should be at all surprised that the party of money took funding for political parties out of our regime and left it to just the money. Yet the emerging democracies of the world are the ones that are making sure it's in there right from the get-go, because they get it. If it isn't a fair playing field, if it's not fair for everybody, then it's not a fair election. That which we have undone, emerging democracies that are nowhere near the level of evolution that we have—and we're far from perfect or finished—get that point that they don't want money buying or skewing their election.

•(1805)

Does money guarantee you win the free election? No, but it's nice to have. If you give me a choice as to whether I have 300 signs out in a neighbourhood, or 500 signs, I'd rather have 500 signs. If I have 500 people who want to put them on their lawns, now I need the money to buy the signs. That's a lot easier if you have friends with money, and you have rules that allow you to hire people through the back door and link that with stifling the Chief Electoral Officer, skewing a few other things, lack of consultation; you put it all together and there is so very little democratic about any of this, that it's an outrage.

I was starting to make reference to the process that the special committee on the Constitution used. They held hearings. Again, the Constitution: pretty important; election laws: pretty important. So you'd think there might be some similarity in how Parliament would approach these two subjects. But it turns out that it's not really Parliament per se. It's the government of the day. If we were in a minority government situation, we would be back where we were before doing the work of the Chief Electoral Officer and starting from there. This would be such a different world.

If anybody dared suggest when we were having those discussions that a government is going to come along and unilaterally impose their will of an election law, every single member of that committee would have said, "Are you crazy? That's never going to happen. Who would dare do that? How could that be?" Yet here we are. Here we are, living, breathing in Canada, and the bill before us didn't have any input. If the government had their way, there wouldn't be any after it was tabled. We saw that by virtue of their ramming it through the House. They said they want to do committee work here. The first thing the opposition does is put forward a very straightforward motion, offers also to move off of that position to find a negotiated compromise that the government can live with and that we can live with, and it's still, no, no, no, no.

They don't want to meet around the clock. Every time I mention we might meet around the clock to do the bill if we get towards the end and run out of time, it's, "Are you crazy? We're not going to work around the clock." Yet, if it's necessary to go around the clock to shut down the official opposition, they say, "That's just regular business. That's okay. But we're not going to do that kind of work, work, work. We're only going to do that if we have to, to get one of you guys," because we're mucking up their idea of how laws should be made in Canada.

•(1810)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Chair.

Is this really relevant, the attacks on the motivations of our government? Is that really relevant to the motion before us today?

The Chair: Not specifically, Mr. Lukiwski. I have had this discussion with Mr. Christopherson before, that we're treading on new ground here. This committee has never had a motion to tell it how it will study a bill. We've always done it through our own steering committee. Say what you will, it has not been our method in how we would determine a study. It has always been this committee that sits here and discusses how we would study it.

I recognize there's a slight difference between the two, but we've just never done it by motion like this.

Thank you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, and I appreciate the civics lesson, but I would also remind honourable members that we've never seen an election law rammed through and been feeling the tyranny of the majority either. But I do appreciate you told me I'm on new ground making this motion. Does that help my relevancy argument? No?

An hon. member: It helps.

Mr. David Christopherson: There you go. Everything's a help.

The Chair: That's why I've given you the leeway for where you are today.

Mr. David Christopherson: Bit by bit, I'm gaining ground. I can feel the momentum.

Why did I raise this? Because it's directly related to my motion in terms of showing that, notwithstanding what you have said, Chair, it's not the usual way. I have said that. I can't say it again because I've already said it, but I have said that this process is not the one we want.

I have been comparing other exercises by our Parliament in terms of looking at major pieces of legislation, and I'm trying to validate as well as I can my second point, which calls for travel, and why that's important.

I am pointing out, Chair, that the special Beaudoin-Edwards committee was struck in 1991, which is back a little bit but not that long in terms of the history of our country. How did they approach the same kind of situation we're looking at right now in terms of a major important piece of legislation, the Constitution, and how would they go about that?

What did they do, Chair? They held hearings in ten provinces and two territories. I think there were just barely three then. When did Nunavut come in, 1997 or 1999? Nobody knows? It was something like that.

The Chair: Mr. Reid might know.

Mr. David Christopherson: Anyway, the point is that they did solve.... By virtue of what we just said, they went everywhere. At least they went to every province and every territory that existed at the time. That's the antithesis of the process that's being suggested here. That's my point, Chair. That's why we've made the motion.

I grant you that we have not done it this way per se, but it is not at all unusual or unacceptable that committees would travel when seized with pan-Canadian issues. What the heck could be more pan-Canadian than our election laws? If you'll accept the notion that our Constitution matters, it makes perfect sense that the Beaudoin-Edwards committee of the day went to every province and every territory. Why? Because it's the Constitution and every province and every territory is a party to it.

Cities aren't, as we know. Cities are not in the constitution. They are creatures of our provinces and territories. It's that legislation that brings them into existence, and there's usually specific legislation for different communities.

But the Constitution, that committee sat there and said to themselves—I'm guessing, but in some way or another, Chair, they said to themselves, "Okay, we have the Constitution. Who's impacted by the Constitution? Everybody. Well we can't visit everybody. The main parties to the Confederation that we have, it might make sense to visit them." That's what they did. It sounds very democratic: the Constitution, which speaks to provinces and territories in the confederated state of Canada and the relationship powers and authority of said national federal government and those of the provinces and the territories. That's what our Constitution does.

So it would make every sense.... Let me flip it around and come at it the other way. Think how ridiculous it would be to talk about amending the Constitution or changing anything with the Constitution and you wouldn't go and ask the provinces and the territories what they thought. Yes, you could have them come here, but that's not what happened. Why? Because they showed the respect of a confederation. A federated state is different from other states and there is respect that has to be shown to the component parts. In this case, it's the provinces and the territories.

The federal government showed its respect for its equal partners in our Confederation of Canada by going—I suspect they probably went to their capitals. I don't know that for sure, but I'm suspecting.... At least they went to a major population centre in each of the provinces and territories, and said, "What do you think?"

Here we are in 2014, seized with a bill that proposes to amend our entire Elections Act. It's already somewhat controversial. We haven't even gotten to the guts of it yet, and we can't get the Conservative government members to agree that we need to show the same respect to Canadians that our predecessors have done, and that provinces and territories in Canada have done. I've also shown the examples of how other mature, respected democracies listen to their people. I've shown that emerging democracies that don't have the same reputation we do, the good reputation, went out and asked their people about their election laws.

● (1815)

When you look at it in its totality, everything I've been talking about, Chair, all of it taken together, one cannot, I don't care how, have a reasonable person look at this and say that the government is being democratic. There government's not being democratic. They are not being fair, and they really have no interest in hearing what Canadians think. What they care about is rigging the next election and getting the fix in early by getting their election law, the Conservative election law, the unfair elections act.

We have much to learn from those who came before, and I can tell you, Chair, that it cost them in their own time and their own constant dollars just as much money as it would have cost us, and it would have taken just as long, maybe even longer. The jets weren't as fast, but the fact remains that what is at stake here and what is missing is respect.

There is no respect shown for colleagues who happen to belong to other parties or who are independents in the House of Commons. They are showing no respect for Elections Canada by not even asking them to be part of this process. They are sure not showing any respect for Canadians and their right to be heard. It's all very disrespectful. It's a disrespectful bill. It's a disrespectful process. Part of why we're doing this is to give Canadians a chance to be aware.

I had mentioned some of the groups in my motion, in the first part, or at least some of them. This is not exhaustive when we make that statement. This isn't everything. But it was an attempt to provide fair representation of who we would have and why.

I want to return to a subject mentioned here, but not something I've already said about it. Referring to my motion about youth groups, I've talked about some groups, but I haven't said what we want to ask them. What we want to hear from young people is, first of all, what they think about the bill, and second, whether it meets their needs. We hear the minister in question period all the time referring to ID and how students are going to benefit, and things like that, but again, it's a democracy. The dialogue is two-way.

What we want to do is, fine, we'll hear from the minister. We showed that respect. We did that, and it was the official opposition that made sure that happened the way it did by giving a guarantee and honouring it. So we heard from the minister.

What we are asking for is the same respect for Canadians, and in this case, the case in point I am talking about, young people. We know that one of the biggest challenges we're facing is that more and more young people are saying, "A pox on all your houses. I'm not going to get involved at all." They're throwing the whole system away. By doing that, it skews the results because not everybody is voting, so it's not everybody's opinion.

There are suggestions in this bill that certain educational aspects of the Chief Electoral Officer's job will be limited. Who is that going to affect the most if not our young people? They're the ones on whom we're trying to instill the notion of the importance of citizenship.

My colleague reminds me there are new Canadians who are thirsty to learn about their new country and thirsty to find a way to participate and be participants. Let me tell you, a lot of those new Canadians come from places where democracy isn't even spoken, where you hear a knock on the door at three in the morning, and you're not heard from again.

● (1820)

Now, we're not there. I'll leave it to experts like my colleague, Mr. Scott, to advise how far away we are from that. We are not there, I'm not accusing that, but I have to tell you, when you start ramming laws through that change the elections and you don't give people a chance to have their say, that's dangerous.

We want to give students and young people an opportunity to participate, to also bring out issues that aren't.... As I said before, there are things that need to be raised that maybe aren't in the bill, but that's the point to raise, "You didn't do this," or "There's this problem over here."

One of the best examples is the kind of powers that the Chief Electoral Officer has asked for in order to get to the truth when he's searching out fraud in elections. Those powers have not been given to the Chief Electoral Officer. I won't debate the merits of that particular point, Chair, but I will point out that it is part of the slippery slope of losing our democracy. It can't be said too many times how wrong it is to have this bill in front of us, when nobody asked the Chief Electoral Officer what he thought, what his recommendations would be? It's a process we've already done before.

We can bemoan the fact that young people aren't voting, and we do and rightfully so. It's a real concern, but it's not going to change if we don't ask them, because with a few exceptions, and my caucus has probably more than some of the others, we're not young people, and I don't speak for myself, but some of my colleagues are. You know, once you're here, your view of everything changes somewhat, so it would seem to me that someone who was, say, a youth activist at McGill, could make up some kind of crazy idea. A student at McGill maybe suddenly gets elected and becomes an MP. Something like that happens—it couldn't really happen, but say it did. It wouldn't take too long, I suspect—you can answer better than I to my colleague—that your view does shift a bit. I wouldn't call it a full Stockholm syndrome situation, but you start to become part of that world and you understand things differently. Sometimes it's a matter of, "Oh, I get that now; I didn't before," but nonetheless you're viewing it differently.

What we still need in every democracy is to hear from those who are part of the voices that need to be heard and are those who aren't in the political loop, and by that I include the media. Those of us who do politics every day, an honourable profession, should be listening to the young people and asking them. That's why our motion includes the young people and their advocates, and new Canadians, because we don't know everything. Maybe some walk around believing that, but we don't. Even collectively we don't know everything. We can make mistakes. Sometimes a mistake is not doing something wrong, but the absence of doing what is right. It doesn't mean you've always done that for evil reasons, but even if by exception, or exclusion, or serendipity, you're making those mistakes, they have to be fixed.

We've made the case in our motion that young people, youth groups, their advocates, their representatives should be heard. We said the same thing for new Canadians. There's so much more we could be doing, Chair, rather than just being here defending, trying to get simple democracy, which is the right to be heard. What we should be doing is looking at trying to make this bill and our election laws as good as they can be. We're nowhere near that.

The government can stand up on their soapbox and say, "We're bringing in these great laws; these are the improvements." Well, that's fine, but that's one voice that happens to be the government, but they won't give anybody else a voice, unless it's under their

timeframe, their constraints, their rules, rather than giving people a chance to be heard in the places where they live.

● (1825)

That's why our motion mentions so many different groups, because we need to hear from them. We ought to be listening to them, commenting on proposals that are coming from the Chief Electoral Officer, from the collective experience of those of us who are here as a starting point.

We have such a democratic deficit on this process before we even get to the bill. That is shameful. I'll give the government this: they're consistently shameful when it comes to their denial of democratic rights to Canadians.

Chair, you mentioned to me that normally we don't have motions like this at PROC. Each committee is master of its own destiny, so we all do things a little differently. I would say to you, Chair, that's part of the reason we are where we are, because we were left with no choice but to do it. It's not so much colouring outside the lines, but trying to change where the lines are, to give everybody a say.

At least it's an attempt, because we can't go to every province and every territory. It's just not going to happen, but we could have worked out something. It's a shame because we're rapidly losing any opportunity for that to happen. The government is digging in. We're digging in. People are starting to become aware but not in enough numbers to move the government, not at this point anyway.

That's why we included in our motion as many representative groups as we could to at least start the notion, because it's not exhaustive, it's not exclusive, that there are other people we need to hear from. Our motion gives an example of what some of those groups might be.

On the question of travel, if we don't go out and give students an opportunity to be heard, how is it going to happen? There will be some representatives, perhaps. That will be good. That will be helpful. But it's still not the same as hearing from Canadians.

I know you won't let me read any more e-mails—it's frustrating, but I respect your right to make that ruling—but it is an indication, if you read enough of them, where you start to see.... I didn't have anything to do with that. We're not pushing, at least I'm not. I don't know anything about it. They just come in to me. There's enough evidence that Canadians want to be heard.

We're left with continuing to fight over what we consider to be basic rights of Canadians. Our motion has called for travel. I've given examples of how different jurisdictions have looked at this differently, and I've compared it in my comments as a way to support my arguments and to support my motion.

I can give more.

In the U.K., the mother ship, they now have a select committee on political and constitutional reform and they are doing a study on voter engagement. It's an ongoing study, but they're doing the crazy idea of asking the British people what they think. It sounds like a familiar argument, to give your own citizenry a say in your election laws and voting procedures.

● (1830)

What's interesting is that they're actually focusing—and this is what I meant earlier by the kind of things we should be doing to make our laws better. This is exactly the kind of thing. This is a perfect example to underscore my point, which supports my motion. They want to increase voter turnout. Did they stay in London? No, they didn't. They were giving all the British people an opportunity to be heard, and that's all we're asking.

Listen, I can't go too far, I know, Chair, but I think it's fair for me to give a representation of a couple of the questions they're asking themselves to show how they're tied in to what we're doing.

For instance, under reasons for and impact of low voter engagement, they ask their own people what the main factors are that have contributed to low voter turnout in recent U.K. elections.

We could be asking a similar kind of question. What are the deficiencies in our election laws? What socio-economic factors affect registration and turnout, and what, if anything, can we learn from this about how to improve voter registration and turnout?

I can't go into the specifics, Chair, because it's not part of my motion, but I certainly can make the point that according to our Minister of Democratic Reform, those are exactly the kinds of issues that Bill C-23 is supposedly going to address.

We in the opposition feel there is a really good chance that not everybody is going to see it that way. We'd like to give them that chance to be heard, especially when you have to take into account the geography of Canada.

They also ask how arrangements for British citizens living abroad to register for and vote in elections in the U.K. can be improved. It's not earth shattering, and I don't imagine that alone would generate too many headlines, but those are exactly the kinds of tombstoning questions you would ask if you're going to be looking at changing your election laws.

Rather than all of us sitting here asking ourselves those same kinds of questions and asking how we can get answers to those kinds of questions because we want to improve these things, we're left with having to bring in a motion which, as the Chair has pointed out, is a little bit different from what we normally do, simply because we're trying to force the government to be more democratic than they're prepared to be on their own inclination.

The very questions they're asking in Britain, and remember, that is the mother ship; that is where all these traditions start. When you go to a Commonwealth meeting, you'll find that with regard to all kinds of questions about parliamentary procedure, almost all of them, very quickly they will start by asking what they are doing in Westminster, what they are doing in the U.K., because they've been doing it for so long, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years. But we're not.

Maybe a basic democratic lesson we could still learn from the mother ship is that when you want to change laws that affect people everywhere and that are fundamental to your democracy, your very first starting point should be to ask Canadians, or your own people in a generic sense, what they think.

In the U.K. example, you could tell just from the procedure that they cared what their people thought, so they put together a process that allowed their citizens to have their say. In the U.K. it's the same thing; in Canada, not so much.

● (1835)

Mr. Craig Scott: Don't forget Zimbabwe.

Mr. David Christopherson: Zimbabwe. I don't think they're part of the Commonwealth. Are they part of the Commonwealth? No?

Maybe we kicked them out.

Mr. Craig Scott: I think they are.

Mr. David Christopherson: It is what—in or out right now?

Mr. Craig Scott: Where is Scott Reid?

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, where is Scott Reid when you need him. Our resident...

Mr. Craig Scott: They should be, whether they've been kicked out or not.

● (1840)

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay, but the point is that whether we're talking about emerging democracies or arguably one of the longest democracies on the planet, both have the same idea about how to address the fundamental questions of how the election laws should work, and what improvements should be made.

A government that got less than 40% of the vote but has 100% of the power should at the very least ask the people, "What do you think of what we want to do?" It really is just "we", the Conservatives, meaning them, because nobody else got a say.

I know I keep coming back to that. I'm not trying to be repetitive on the point, but it's legitimate to take a couple of basic points and come back to them and underscore them without expanding on them, so I'm constantly coming back to the lack of democracy, the lack of input, the lack of caring what anybody thinks. That's what's going on, folks.

I do not know where Bill C-23 was written, but it was not written with the input of the opposition members or the Chief Electoral Officer. That alone should scare the dickens out of Canadians, that their election laws are being treated this way. By the time Canada Day comes, if the government has their way, the Conservative election law, or rather the election law to elect Conservatives, will already be in place. The next time we'll be talking about this and being seized of it in any way is after the next election, and that's just fine with them.

Back to my point, back to my motion. From the most experienced to the newest, the richest to the poorest, democracies everywhere are showing what it is to be democratic and to give the appearance of being democratic.

That takes me back, I had talked about the referral—I'm shifting gears, as you may have picked up, but I had mentioned earlier about the process of referring from first reading, and I used my own explanation, which is never as good as the bible. As everybody here knows, O'Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, is the bible.

Chair, I did mention earlier that the government has the option, if they wanted to, to push a reset button and get us back to first reading. We still could put this back on track. It really could be done. I don't imagine at this stage, with everything we've witnessed, that the government is at all interested, but by unanimous consent the House could turn itself back. I can ask and see if he can do anything.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Chair.

The Chair: Yes, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: This is definitely repetition. We've talked about that several times before over the last few days.

The Chair: It is true.

Mr. David Christopherson: It is. What is also true is that I didn't read the actual reference to be accurate in making my point on my motion.

The Chair: I would challenge you, Mr. Christopherson, that I believe you did read something this morning. It probably wasn't out of the book, but it was a printing of it, I think.

But I'm going to let you proceed before I tell you I've already heard that.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's not that long, and I won't even try to read footnotes. I'll just read what's here, Chair, and see where we are. This is the explanation of the tool available to the House of Commons after a bill is read for the first time. Rather than send it to second reading, at which we lock into our political positions in large part, and then send it to committee, this allows the opportunity to send it to committee first, in the hope that politics is left outside the door and will only re-enter after you've had a good, honest go-around without any politics.

I am reading from page 742, chapter 16. It is titled, "Reference to Committee Before Second Reading".

Traditionally, adoption of the motion for second reading amounts to approval by the House of the principle of the bill. This effectively limits the scope of any amendments that may be made during committee study and at report stage. In order to provide more flexibility in the legislative process, the House amended its Standing Orders in 1994, instituting a new procedure that allows Ministers to

move that a government bill be referred to committee before second reading. This empowers Members to examine the principle of a bill before second reading, and enables them to propose amendments to alter its scope. The procedure also applies to bills based on ways and means motions.

When the Order of the Day is read for second reading of a government bill, a Minister may, after notifying representatives of the opposition parties, propose a motion that the bill be forthwith referred to a committee before second reading. The Standing Orders are silent as to the manner in which the representatives of the opposition parties are to be notified.

Boy, you could get yourself into trouble on that one, but....

The current practice is for the Government House Leader to give such notice during the Thursday Statement, although it is not uncommon for a Minister to inform the House of the government's intention at the time of the introduction and first reading of the bill. The motion to refer forthwith the bill to a committee is not subject to amendment, and debate is limited to five hours. At the end of the five hours, or when no Member rises to speak, the Speaker puts the question. If the motion is adopted, the bill is referred to a standing, special or legislative committee for consideration.

In general, during clause-by-clause consideration of a bill, the committee follows the same rules and procedures as those that apply to the consideration of bills in committee after second reading. It may hear witnesses and receive briefs. However, the scope of the amendments that may be made to the bill is much wider, given that the committee study is not limited by the principle of the bill, the principle not yet having been approved by the House—

which is what you do at second reading. As it hasn't happened yet, politics hasn't entered the process formally yet.

At the conclusion of its study, the committee reports the bill to the House, with or without amendment. The report stage of the bill may not commence prior to the third sitting day following the presentation of the report.

After the committee has reported the bill to the House, the next stage essentially fuses report stage and second reading. Members may propose amendments, after giving written notice two...days prior to the bill being called. When consideration of report stage is concluded, a motion "That the bill (as amended) be concurred in at report stage with (a)...stage and read a second time" is put and forthwith disposed of by the House, without debate or amendment. Once concurred in at report stage and read a second time, the bill is set down for third reading and passage at the next sitting of the House.

I'm done.

● (1845)

I won't attempt to make the arguments over again, but I am underscoring that this would have been a very legitimate, positive, helpful approach. The government still maintains control all the way, because they have their secret weapon: the majority vote. You get the best of both worlds.

They could have given every opportunity for wide discussion and input, disagreement, amendment—quite similarly to the process, Chair, that we followed over the course of those two Parliaments when we studied the recommendations that came from the Chief Electoral Officer three years ago, or four, I guess, when we started. It would have allowed us to use that as a starting point. We wouldn't be having these kinds of debates, because we'd be so far removed from them.

Now, to be fair, Chair, those kinds of debates could still happen under that process. I'm not suggesting that it's all milk and honey just because we make the referral from first reading. But I am suggesting in support of my motion—and then I'll move along—that the motion wouldn't even have to be here if the government had shown some sincerity and had agreed with us to send it after first reading. It would have arrived here with no politics, nobody having said they were in favour or opposed. It would just be: here it is; let's start. Then we'd start going through it.

We can still do that. I don't sense any desire on the part of this government, but certainly procedurally and theoretically it can be done. Since we moved it the first time...

I see some brows over there crossed. I wonder whether the government would just acknowledge that the politics wouldn't be in it, and if they started to creep in, as I've already said, they have the majority and could have gotten away from that.

You can still do it, for the simple reason that by unanimous consent we can do anything that's constitutional. The committee, quite frankly, can do anything within its mandate by unanimous consent. We can set aside the existing rules and replace them with brand new ones specific to the moment. It happens all the time. I mentioned the Ukrainian vote last night. That's a perfect example of unanimous consent.

By unanimous consent we could reset this and be back here doing this the right way, which is to give an honest hearing and airing of the issues that are before us. I don't sense that this is going to happen.

• (1850)

The Chair: Mr. Scott, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Craig Scott: I didn't mean to cut off my colleague, but I'm wondering, Mr. Chair, whether some of what he's just been saying might have found a purchase on the other side and whether there's any interest at all. If so, could you advise me how we could do this with some form of unanimous consent, to report back to the House that in fact this committee should be looking at this bill as the first reading committee and ask whether that's possible?

I know from page 984 of Bosc and O'Brien that the power of the committee to report is generally interpreted as being as often as we wish, and all that has to happen is that the committee has to agree and ask the chair to report back.

I'd like to have some direction, if I could, Mr. Chair, on whether or not you would be at all open to some form of procedure that would take seriously what my colleague, Mr. Christopherson, has been saying about why this bill would benefit from having its scope opened, and therefore from our sitting in a first reading as opposed to a second reading mode.

The Chair: My understanding, Mr. Scott, is that for that to happen Mr. Christopherson would have to give up the floor on his motion, and we could have that discussion.

Mr. David Christopherson: I went down that road once before. I know where that got me.

Mr. Craig Scott: Let me just follow up, then. If he were to give up the floor for this, are you saying that any procedure of that sort is open?

The Chair: I would suggest that negotiations between parties happen all the time, Mr. Scott. You could as well as I, or perhaps better than the chair, check on that.

Mr. Craig Scott: Are you therefore not ruling out that if an agreement were made along those lines, you would not now be telling us that it would be out of order?

The Chair: The chair would never tell you that a unanimous agreement among committee members was out of order.

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

The Chair: Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson. Sorry.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you very much, Chair. No, that's fine.

Shifting gears again, I've made a number of references, both domestic and international, to ways that by comparison make the government look pretty bad. It makes Canada look bad, but it's the government of the day, the Conservatives.

Our motion has specifically called for travel. You have been very clear that I can't use repetitive arguments that I've used before. Although you did allow me to give those examples, you're drawing the line at my going back and using those examples again because of repetitiveness. With much reluctance I accept that is the rule. However, I would like to add to the body of evidence that I've already presented by also giving new examples, new to this debate from the time I have had the floor.

The first example I'd like to give is the second sitting of the 36th Parliament. Aboriginal Affairs did a study of Bill C-9. They had 10 meetings from November 15, 1999, to November 19, 1999. They must have been working hard, ten meetings in four days. That's pretty good.

But my point is that they travelled to five cities: Terrace, Smithers, Prince George, Victoria, and Vancouver.

• (1855)

Mr. Pat Martin: I was on that trip.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Martin advises me he was on that trip.

Mr. Pat Martin: The first nations governance act, 52 days at committee....

Mr. David Christopherson: There we go, a governance act and 52 days at committee.

Again, there are all kinds of examples. That's why I'm taking the time to do it, because it supports my motion as to why it's appropriate that we would travel, and why I continue to give examples of where committees have travelled and how that's benefited the committee and the people who had an opportunity to come forward. It's very fortunate that Mr. Martin just sat in beside me now, and actually was at that session and can speak and attest to the importance of giving Canadians their say.

We also had a special committee on the non-medical use of drugs. It was the study of Bill C-344. They held 20 meetings: December 3, 2001, to December 6, 2001; February 18, 2002, to February 21, 2002; April 15, 2002, to April 18, 2002; and May 21, 2002, to May 24, 2002. They went to seven cities. They went to Vancouver and Abbotsford, both in B.C.; Toronto, Ontario; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Edmonton, Alberta; and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

One gets the impression they really wanted to hear from people.

An hon. member: They didn't go to Winnipeg.

Mr. David Christopherson: People in Winnipeg...? There you go. Everything can be made better. That was 2001. Who was the government then?

Anyway, moving on to my third.... In the 37th Parliament, second sitting, the aboriginal affairs committee studied Bill C-7. Thirty meetings, thirty, and we can't get any. They got 30. From March 17, 2003, to March 26, 2003, and March 31, 2003, they went to 30 meetings. They went to 18 cities. Which ones you ask? I knew somebody would ask me which ones.

So that would be Red Deer, Alberta, lovely place; Nanaimo, B.C., good committee; Prince Rupert, B.C.; Prince George, B.C.; Fort McMurray, Alberta—you'd think there'd be some appeal from the other side there, they'd want to hear from Albertans but I guess not—Slave Lake, Alberta; Prince Albert, Saskatchewan; North Battleford, Saskatchewan; Regina, Saskatchewan; Sudbury, Ontario; Thompson, Manitoba; Winnipeg, Manitoba; Thunder Bay, Ontario; Toronto, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Fredericton, New Brunswick; Montreal, Quebec; and Val-d'Or, Quebec.

That is a serious consultation. It's also very relevant because if you look at those cities, they are either areas where there are first nations reserves and therefore first nations people, or they are communities, urban centres, where aboriginal Canadians are living, first nations people.

I'm sitting beside someone who is an expert compared to what I might know about this. However, the issues for first nations people on reserve and in cities, while there are some overlaps of concerns in terms of ID and some of the formula there, a lot of it has to do with their rights in two different geographical settings. If I live on the reserve, it's one set. If I leave the reserve and I live in an urban setting, the rules are very different. Certainly my society around me affects me in a different way.

So that's why they went there. They could have made the argument the government is making here and said it's aboriginal affairs but we can bring in Chief Atleo and we can bring in everybody else we need and get a video link. Why do we need to go there? Why? Funny, nobody made the...and if they did make an argument then it wasn't the prevailing thought. The majority of them said no, are you crazy? We have a bill here about aboriginal affairs. It makes all the sense in the world that we better go out and talk to the Canadians that this affects. That's what they did. My colleague says respect. I said that word earlier and that's what's missing. That committee showed respect to the Canadians they visited. The government right now is not showing any respect.

Am I done, you ask? No. There are more examples—and all need to be mentioned to support my motion—that go on to explain and hopefully convince my colleagues why there are times when it is good for democracy for committees to travel. This is one of them. Another one was in 2003, citizenship and immigration again studying Bill C-18 and they held 29 meetings. They visited a dozen cities.

• (1900)

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): That's democracy.

Mr. David Christopherson: That's real democracy. That is democracy.

Where did they go, you ask? I'm glad you asked. They went to Toronto, Ontario; Halifax, Nova Scotia; Winnipeg, Manitoba—there you go, Kevin, they went there, they saw the light—St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador; Regina, Saskatchewan; Charlottetown, P.E.I.; Edmonton, Alberta; Fredericton, New Brunswick; Victoria, B.C.; Quebec City in Quebec; Vancouver, B.C.; and Montreal.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's very thorough.

Mr. David Christopherson: It's very thorough, a good representation of the country. Again I said wheels within wheels. It's one thing to say, well we have to go out and we have to listen to Canadians. But if you went to just one province, that's not going to cut it. So there's the whole politics of where you go so that Canadians across the country feel that you've been fair-minded. They know you're not going to come to every community in the country. They get that but they do think that a fair representation, a cross-section of Canadian life, Canadian living, Canadian perspectives, is important and shows respect.

Mr. Pat Martin: Respect outside the bubble too.

Mr. David Christopherson: There's no respect here.

My last example is that it's not always just the number of cities you visit that decides whether it's democratic or not, because not everything needs to go everywhere, i.e., for Bill C-15 nobody outside the Northwest Territories was pounding the table saying, you didn't come and see me.

Nova Scotia wasn't all upset that they didn't have a chance to make comment on Bill C-15. They may have had comments if it affected them in a government-to-government situation or could have constitutional impacts, but in terms of being the primary focus of who you'd want to hear from, I'd be surprised if there was anybody outside the Northwest Territories who was upset that no one was visited.

We've seen other committees that have pan-Canadian implications and those committees respected that, those countries respected that. Even Zimbabwe was on that list of governments that were willing to listen to their people. But it's not just the number, it's what's appropriate to the time, to the moment, to what's in front of us.

Let me give you an example that doesn't have a long exhaustive list, but shows how strategically they still left the Ottawa bubble to go and hear from Canadians. In the 39th Parliament, first session, the justice and human rights committee did a study of Bill C-10 and they had one meeting.

• (1905)

Mr. Craig Scott: These examples are piling up.

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, there are a lot of examples piling up. What's interesting on this one, I thought, was that they only had one meeting and they did it in Toronto. They didn't even have to meet here in Ottawa. It's not like you have to do it here—must, must, must. No, in some cases, they went somewhere else and that's where they had their hearing. They heard from the folks they needed to. They thought that was the right geographical place to be in, so they had their meeting. Ottawa, quite frankly, as a place, had nothing to do with it.

The reason I'm making this point, Chair, to underscore my motion is that it's not necessarily the absolute raw number of communities that you visit, it's that you visit communities that are representative of Canadians who are impacted by the law that's put before them. That's all we're asking for.

I didn't read out 20 meetings and 30 meetings because that was the standard I want to bump the government up to. In fact, I've already made it clear from the get-go that in our motion, if the government were willing to sit down and talk and negotiate, there's room for us to move. But that requires the government moving off their position, which is: no way, no one, never. Just in the safety and security of the Ottawa bubble, that's it.

Somewhere in between those two positions was peace and harmony and even a bit of goodwill. It certainly would have been better governance and good governance compared to where we are now, because we would have actually been working on the bill at hand and we'd be talking about the witnesses that we want to hear in those communities. We wouldn't go on having to listen to me pontificate forever and ever and ever. None of that would be relevant. It wouldn't matter. We would be doing the real work.

I have said it before and this I need to say again. We are still prepared to do the work, but more and more of the sand is running out of the hourglass. It's becoming very clear that no matter what we say or do, short of Canadians telling this government you have to change your process, they're going to ram through what they want, and ramming doesn't necessarily mean the speed involved. In a democracy, it also means whether or not the minority is being respected. And you know what? That's a lot about what makes Canada work and that's why a lot of people admire Canada, because of the respect we show each other regardless of our status. Regardless of whether we're one of 30 million or standing alone. They matter, and in a democracy, that vote matters, because if you don't have that vote in a democracy, you might as well not live in one because it's not relevant to you.

So Mr. Chair, that's what brought about our motion, the one with three distinct sections. It talks about witnesses, who we think should be here. That's why I've taken the time to mention some of the groups we've actually listed in our motion so I could offer you and colleagues supporting evidence for this motion. I've talked at great

length about other examples of democracy where respect is a cornerstone of their process. I've raised examples of this House of Commons sending delegations from Ottawa to all the far-flung corners of this great, huge country.

I've even showed how we spent tens of thousands of dollars to send Canadian MPs and a Canadian House of Commons standing committee all the way to Ukraine, where they held public hearings with Ukrainians in three different cities to ask them about their democracy.

• (1910)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Chair, repetition....

The Chair: Carry on, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair. I'm not trying to repeat. I'm recapping—

The Chair: I know.

Mr. David Christopherson: —and I appreciate your recognizing it for what it is. Thank you. I'll try not to abuse that; I know you won't let me.

I have tried to show that this is not political grandstanding. I've made it clear that my leader, who is sitting beside me now—and I've said this before—is not interested in grandstanding, that this is too important, and that, yes, the motion will include a tentative start date for clause-by-clause.

I haven't talked about the third point yet today. That's what will take me to dawn, talking about the third point. I have mentioned—and I won't stay on it long—that as an opposition party you don't normally put a start date in a motion because you box yourself in. You don't do that.

But given the direction we received from our leader, it was to go in. It was meant to be a motion, we hoped, that we could get adopted. But if not adopted, we would come to some kind of a compromise and get through the process and move on.

My leader was insistent that this not be an embarrassing piece of grandstanding that wouldn't stand the scrutiny that would come when put before people. That's why I have referred back to this over and over. I have said over and over that we are open to discussions. We still are open to discussions and negotiations to find a way through this so we can stop focusing on process and start focusing on the law and on hearing from Canadians who are affected by this law.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: Yet still, more in sorrow than anger, we get nothing. I can't go into details, honour won't allow it, but I can just say that I initiated one more attempt to see if we could negotiate some way through this. All I can say is that those discussions didn't last long. The government is just so unreasonable. All they wanted was everything, and that's not negotiation.

So here we are, 7:15 at night, continuing to plead as well as demand from the government some respect—some respect for Canadians—to allow us to have a process that's at least fair.

Now I want to move on to that third point that I haven't yet talked about today, about putting in the start date of clause-by-clause. If I can, I want to read it. I didn't read it earlier. I would just like to recap it because I'm about to speak to it.

That third bullet point, Chair, in my motion is:

That the Committee shall only proceed to clause-by-clause consideration of this bill after these hearings have been completed, with a goal to commence clause-by-clause consideration for Thursday, May 1, 2014.

Had the government been reasonable, Chair, we would be well on our way to meeting that deadline. We would be doing it, if not in unanimity, at least in agreement, at least through a process that we could live with, the government could live with, the third party, everybody who's a party to this could feel is fair.

I don't know what's going to happen on May 1. Part of the risk we took, we're now paying the price for. As early as the last meeting, the media, and they're pretty smart, calculated the math on all this, looked at it, and said, "Yes, Dave, but what about? What about?" Sure enough, putting that date in there is a political problem. That's why you don't do it.

But if you are serious, as an official opposition, to extend an olive branch to the government to say, "We can find a way to come to at least an agreement we can both live with, we can do that", then you do put it in there so that you can put meaning behind your words, so that you're not just saying we want a fair deal, you're not just saying we're not grandstanding, you're not just saying we want to offer a process that we can make work, you're prepared to stand by it.

That's why it was in there and that's why, to some degree, you almost wish it wasn't because it's going to come back to haunt us. But we were that serious, and this is what's so disappointing, Chair.

Given the importance of the bill, and given the fact that we know improvements need to be made, we know from the violations of the election laws as they are right now—and I won't get partisan, but I don't need to because people get it—there needs to be major reform. A process like the motion that I put forward on behalf of myself and my colleagues and my leader was, and still is, even at this late hour, an attempt to try to find a compromise.

That's not a dirty word. Down in the American Congress it seems to be, and they use it that way—you compromise, you're a sellout—and look where that's got them. A real compromise means that everybody gives up just a little bit in order to have peace and harmony. We could have, and still could, if the government brought the same kind of good will. It is just so sad that it's come to this, with all the problems we've had with the election laws and all the concerns there have been with things that have happened in the last election, and the crying need for reform, that cry being led by our Chief Electoral Officer as far back as 2010, when he brought this forward and we spent, what, two years of Canadians' time and money to study this. For what?

●(1915)

There's almost none of it reflected in the bill. There are some things, but not much, and certainly not the key things.

Hope springs eternal. I have said that a few times. There is still time. My sense is that without a dramatic change in approach from

the government, we're not going to get there easily. I'd have to say that there's probably a good chance that we're just not going to get there and that this whole process is going to be under a cloud, and that at the end of the day there will be an election law but not really a "Canadians' election law". It's the "Conservatives' election law", or more appropriately, the "law to elect Conservatives" or the "Unfair Elections Act".

But the one thing it is not is a fair election law, and we can't get to that determination, Chair, until we get a fair process. That, to bring it back again, is why my motion was put forward, constructed in the way it was.

The government still has a way. They have a couple of options. One is that we can start talking a little bit about this to try to put something together. They can take us all the way back to a unanimous consent on first reading and send it here as a referral. I took the time to read the rules and I think everyone understands that this is a safe process for the government. They still control everything. It's not as though things get out of hand or out of control. There's time to do it. We have the means. What we don't have is the willpower.

So we will persevere and we will continue to bring in submissions and to make arguments as best we can and as you're best going to allow. I will now move to more evidence to support my motion, in the hope that I can continue to win the hearts and minds of Conservatives—if not everywhere, at least on the other side of the table.

Now, in our motion, Chair, I mentioned a number of groups that we would be seeking to have a representation from. One of them.... It's rather a general description, but it's done that way on purpose to leave latitude for inviting different guests to come before the committee.

They're not guests, if they're citizens, are they? It's their own House.

Part of the motion says, in the first bullet point, "as well as specific groups which have been active in society on elections rules". Another one of the groups we would be looking forward to bringing in is CARP.

I won't read this whole thing, because I know the trouble that will get me into with you, sir, and I am diligently trying to avoid it. The longer I go without your reminding me, the more successful I am being and the easier it is for both of us. So I'll do my best here also.

CARP is an organization that was founded by Moses Znaimer, an internationally renowned Canadian broadcaster and media pioneer, the founder of 20 popular Canadian television channels and stations, including CTV and MuchMusic.

I won't read any more on that. Most Canadians know of Mr. Znaimer and his role in society and his opinions on democracy and related issues. He was a co-founder of CARP and he has been a sort of spokesperson for the baby boomer generation, with that magazine *Zoomer*.

• (1920)

Oh, I see. I was wondering where that came from: boomers with zip—that's where *Zoomer* came from. That's good.

Anyway, the reason that CARP would like to comment is that they have been active in society. They have put out a lot of position papers on many issues, particularly those that relate to aging boomers and the issues that go with getting older. But they also make very serious comments on important pieces of legislation.

Someone will correct me if I'm wrong—I'm going to go out on a bit of a limb here—but I believe they are very supportive of increasing the CPP... If they aren't, they should be. But I'll go out on a limb and suggest that they probably are. I know they're in support of ensuring that people are able to retire in dignity. I know they have concerns about the current retirement situation, in which fewer and fewer people have defined benefits and are having to rely on the stock market more.

In relation to my motion, what they would be talking about would be our election law. Probably they would begin to talk about how it affects people of a certain age, if you will, because there are related issues.

Remember, this is Canada, and so, many of those situations will depend on where they live geographically. That is, the challenges and the situation you face as an aging boomer—I give myself as a poster child—are different in a major urban centre from what they would be in a rural setting or on a first nations reserve or in the high Arctic or in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. In many of the group areas I have mentioned, CARP and Mr. Znaimer would be considered expert witnesses on how this law would affect that particular demographic.

Again, that's why the motion is here, that's why the motion is worded the way it is, and that's why the kinds of people and groups we would invite are very germane to what is in front of us and to pointing out where the bill goes wrong and where it goes right.

It could be, Chair, that there are some issues that we, as the opposition, are pounding the table about and very concerned about, but about which we may find out that everything's fine. I doubt it, but it could happen. But we won't really know until we get to these hearings.

Not only that, there may be some things that we think are just fine as politicians, but if we get a chance to hear from other representatives, experts in the field—

• (1925)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair. It is nothing about David's dissertation. I was wondering whether our colleague Mr. Julian was attempting to take photos or a video of these proceedings.

The Chair: We saw that and were on our way to tell him when he recognized that he was at fault. We will consider him admonished and move on.

Mr. David Christopherson: He can be admonished longer.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: He's willing to make that sacrifice, Chair. Take a half hour; really let him know how wrong that was.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): I'm willing to accept any punishment.

Mr. David Christopherson: The apology itself could probably take a while, because he will want to do it thoroughly. He's a very considerate, honourable member.

The Chair: I understand that.

Mr. David Christopherson: My point in raising that, Chair, in relation to my motion, is to again point out that not all of the knowledge of Canada resides here at PROC, notwithstanding the government's belief that they have nothing to hear from anybody outside the safe and secure bubble of Ottawa. We beg to differ, we have begged to differ for many hours, and we continue to differ. We will continue to give examples of groups that we want to bring in, and to explain why their points of view matter, and why it's important for us to not just hear from these representatives here in Ottawa, but in some cases to give them or the folks they represent an opportunity to make their case where they live. That's our motion. There are three components to the motion.

The first one is witnesses—who—and I've been providing why. The second is about travel, and we talked a fair bit about that—not done yet. The last one, I don't talk about as much, but it is relevant and it's there for an important reason: the May 1 start. It's a goal. It wasn't an end date, and it's still achievable. It's still very achievable, especially, Chair, given the fact that this committee is a master of its own destiny, and that this committee can meet whatever hours and days it chooses. We still have plenty of time to do the right thing. We have the means to do the right thing. What we do not have is the political will on the part of the government, the Conservatives, to do the right thing. So we continue to insist, as best we can, that this government needs to let go of its ironclad grip on this process and recognize that others are entitled to have their say, and not just here in the safety and security of Ottawa.

Chair, we mentioned some places in our motion. For instance, we took a generic descriptor like Atlantic Canada, rather than being provincially specific to that. That was on purpose. As you know, oftentimes an opposition party in particular will mention as many places as they can because it's good politics. It rings well and people like seeing their place mentioned there. But we deliberately made it very general in terms of the areas and regions of Canada we wanted to go to.

I just wanted to mention that some of the places that the other committees have been to would be ideal for us to visit—absolutely ideal. Earlier I talked about Iqaluit and about how that would be a good place for us, how easy it is to get there, that there are fine accommodations there, and that there's lots of security, so the government doesn't need to be worried about being attacked by Canadians. I don't know who they're afraid of. There's probably a bigger chance of getting attacked by bears than any of the Canadians up there. But whatever, there's lots of security. Everyone would be nice and safe. They don't need to worry about a thing. Somebody will hold their hand all the way from the hotel to the committee room. We'll make sure nobody gets hurt by those Canadians who might have a sign that says, "Stop Harper".

•(1930)

Now I mention that lead-in, Chair, because I'd like to give an example of the first place that we mentioned, Atlantic Canada. I've already made reference to the north and I did talk about the difference between northern Ontario and northern Canada, which are very different.

But in this case what I'd like to do is to point to the Atlantic provinces. What I have in front of me, Chair, is certainly a reference to Charlottetown. In 2011 Charlottetown had a population of 34,562. They have 44 square kilometres with 35,000 people. Why would we go there, would be the question one might ask. We would answer that first of all, it's Canada. It's Atlantic Canada, it's a well-known city. I don't have the flight times for that one, as I did for Iqaluit, but I know it's pretty easy to get there. I'm 100% certain that there's lots of security so the government doesn't need to worry about being frightened by their own citizens.

An hon. member: Or signs...

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, signs are scary, you know, so we need to understand their sensitivities. But Charlottetown would provide a great opportunity, and quite frankly so would Summerside. Summerside has about 14,751 people, according to 2011 numbers. It has a lot less area. It's a beautiful city. Both of them are, if anybody has ever been there. But it's another place, Chair, that I can virtually guarantee that all members would be safe. They would find the accommodations quite comfortable and they would be hearing from Atlantic Canadians about what they think about the bill, just like they did in the countries I mentioned, just like they did in the provinces I mentioned, and just like this House of Commons has done over and over. We could go to those two cities, and we could have very good meetings, or we could go to either one.

I see you nodding, thinking, "That would be nice, because that's a nice place". P.E.I.'s beautiful. These are wonderful places to go. So there's the added perk of not just going somewhere because you should go there, but you get to go somewhere that's beautiful to boot and hang around with beautiful people. It's a win-win-win.

I'm trying to think of other ways to get them to want to do these things. The other way didn't work.

Mr. Pat Martin: There's Anne of Green Gables.

Mr. David Christopherson: Anne of Green Gables, there you go, world-renowned. It's a chance for our members to experience that, bring their daughters and kids back little souvenirs. Great.

So it's a great opportunity for the government to enjoy themselves on these hearings. Most importantly, they would be giving Canadians the one thing that we have said since we started talking about this motion that is lacking in every part of this: respect. By going there, we'd be showing all Canadians—let me correct that, because we're ready to go—the government, Conservatives, would get a chance to show all Canadians that they're not going to just hide here in the Ottawa bubble, but that they're prepared to go out into the country and ask Canadians about their election law in the places where they live. Plus we would get the benefit of regionally being in the Atlantic, and we can do more there if we want. I'm giving the example of how we could have compromised and found locations that would be representative of Canadians' thoughts on this, or at

least to a degree that would allow us to move forward. Certainly they would get a chance to hear from people who live in P.E.I. and how they are affected by these laws.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Salt of the earth...

Mr. David Christopherson: The salt of the earth, my leader says. Give them a chance to be heard.

•(1935)

Mr. Peter Julian: Hear, hear.

Mr. David Christopherson: Now, the same thing could be said about Calgary. Most of them across the table like Calgary. It's another beautiful city, world-renowned, with some economic stats that are just amazing. There is a beautiful downtown to their city.

There is so much to be heard, yet this government won't go there. They won't go to Calgary or to Edmonton.

It's not as if we're only going to stand on a motion that says you have to go to the back alleys of Hamilton, two blocks over from where I live. My colleague Mr. Martin is toing and froing, but no, we really wouldn't do that.

No. What we're talking about here is inviting the committee, maybe as a selection, to go to Calgary. Surely the government members aren't afraid in Calgary—are you?

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): No.

Mr. David Christopherson: There we go; there is one brave soul willing to say that he's not afraid.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Oh, you don't think we need to go there? I'm sorry; say it on the record, if you don't mind. You don't think we should go to Calgary specifically?

The Chair: Don't talk across the table, gentlemen.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair. I was just trying to afford the member a chance to be clear on what he seemed to want to say.

Ms. Ève Pécelet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Don't forget Montreal.

The Chair: You were given the floor; let's not...[*Inaudible—Editor*].

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, that's not going to happen. But I did give him a chance to heckle out, which I could have repeated and it would have gone into Hansard. I'm just trying to be helpful, Chair, as you can see.

The Chair: Well, we certainly appreciate that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you. I appreciate your appreciation.

I think going to Calgary would be a grand idea. We heard from the government that they don't want to go anywhere. They didn't qualify their comments. They said public hearings outside Ottawa would be a circus. They said public hearings outside of the Ottawa bubble would be a gong show. If that's what they honestly believe, let's go to the heartland of conservatism—Alberta—and we'll go to Calgary or we'll go to Fort McMurray.

They can pick any place they want where they feel the safest. Maybe we could hold hearings in the mines and they would feel safe there. Nobody could get at them—no bombs, no placards. That might be an idea. It's available. It's just an idea, Chair. I'm just trying to be helpful in throwing out all these ideas.

So we could go to Calgary. I'd love to go to Calgary. I can never get enough of Calgary. It's a beautiful city in a beautiful province. Let's go there. There's no hidden agenda here, Chair. There's a lot of sound and fury; I accept all of that. But there are not games in this motion. There are not.

At no time—I think I can say this. I'm not divulging secrets. At no time did I indicate to the government, when we had our short-lived negotiations, that certain cities either were or had to be on the list or off the list. We didn't get that far. At no time in our early discussions about shaping the parameters of our discussion did I say that there was somewhere we had to go or somewhere we couldn't go. So this business of its being a gong show and a circus...

Fine; let's go to some cities that the government is going to choose. Let's go to whatever area of the country they feel comfortable and safe enough in to actually say to Canadians, "Excuse me, what's your opinion?" Wherever they want to go to do that is fine.

Yes, there are a couple of places we'd like to go, that we think are a good idea. I raised Iqaluit, which I thought would make a lot of sense in terms of the ease of getting there from here, etc. I won't repeat those arguments, but I raised that issue as an example of somewhere we could go.

We could go to Saskatchewan. We held our last retreat in Regina; we could go there. Really, there's nothing scary about Saskatchewan. My dad was from Saskatchewan. I'm very proud to have Saskatchewan blood. I don't think they're scary people. I'm sure we could safely fly you in and out and guarantee that you won't be.... Well, you might be upset, but you won't be hurt.

An hon. member: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm sorry; you seem to want the floor, but you don't have it.

I don't know what's going on, Chair. Either have him heckle so that I can hear him or ask him to be quiet—one of the two.

● (1940)

The Chair: I think he was making a comment with respect to your Ticats, but I won't go there.

Mr. David Christopherson: Are we getting that low? Is it that bad?

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: They're the CFL's second-best team.

Mr. David Christopherson: Don't forget next year.

We're kidding here to break the moment, but I say again that the fact is that they can be cities in which the government thinks they're going to get the most support. We're not trying to jig the process the way the government jiggled the bill. We're not. So if they have suggestions, we'd be open to them. I am very sincere.

I am kidding about the security and all of that, but given what was said about a gong show and a circus.... Really, what did the government expect to get back after saying things like that about Canadians? What did they think?

I'm quite prepared to say that some of the choices would be those of the government. There may be places that they want to go to because they believe they'll get good testimony and good witnesses and that they'll get supportive witnesses. That's fair enough; that's part of the process.

Why is it that we're willing, as the opposition, to accept that the government has the right to stake out some places we would go to in which they are likely to get support, but they are not willing to do the same thing in other parts of Canada where they don't have that same security? Although I have to wonder about any government that hides from its own people, because that's what's going on.

Mr. Pat Martin: It's the beginning of the end.

Mr. David Christopherson: Make no mistake, Chair, I'm not making this up. The government's quoted words are there. The reason they didn't want to do public hearings wasn't that they didn't think it was an important part of the process, it wasn't that they didn't want to hear from Canadians, and it wasn't that they didn't want to go to certain parts of the country—all things they could have said about why they don't want to travel that would at least have been a respectable comment they could have hidden behind.

No. Instead, they did what comes natural to them, which is to lash out and insult people. So then we got the remarks about a gong show, a circus—

Mr. Pat Martin: Shame.

Mr. David Christopherson: It is shameful. It's very shameful, because that's a part of the democratic process. It's called free speech. Free speech happens quite often outside the House of Commons, out on Parliament Hill, on the street. People very peacefully come and they protest and they have concerns. Not once has that stopped us from being able to do our jobs. They respectfully do their protest thing, and we respectfully go about doing our work, and hopefully, if their cause is good and just, we will be affected by it and it will ultimately affect the way we make decisions.

But this whole notion that we can't do public hearings—

● (1945)

Mr. Craig Scott: In Calgary....

Mr. David Christopherson: —in Calgary because it will be a gong show.... Really?

I wonder if they make that kind of statement at Calgary City Hall, that they can't trust their citizens to come out and behave in a civilized fashion, and that they would just participate in what the government wants to call a gong show. I don't know who the genius was that came up with that as the response, but boy, that was not the one to give.

But what it did do was give us an insight into the way the government views the very citizens who they govern, and that is, with contempt, with a measure of fear.

All we've done with our motion is to point out the importance of the process to this bill. We believe the process in its own way is as important as the bill. Because if there is an unfair process, how can you come up with a fair bill and a fair election, with a fair elections act?

The government's arguments don't hold. But I have maintained, and it's my position, that the government doesn't care about how much negativity there is because it's more than worth it. Whatever negative press, whatever negative hits they take now, it's worth it because they're banking on Canadians forgetting and not thinking about this again until the election is in the bag. Then they'll worry about dealing with everything afterwards.

That's why they have no problem being so disrespectful, and that's why they sit there the way they do looking everywhere except at themselves as to why we're here tonight. It's certainly not because I enjoy talking—I do—but even I don't like talking this long.

It's funny to see the people who speak for me laugh.

It's got us in a place now where you have a bit of a standoff. I'll continue to go as long as I can.

Mr. Peter Julian: Hear, hear!

Mr. David Christopherson: But it's not nearly as much fun as all of us working together, rolling up our sleeves, and trying to come up with rules that are fair for everybody. I was part of that process, and that was fun. It really was. It was good work. It was hard work and it wasn't perfect, but it was fulfilling. We were doing something important. We can get there.

I won't dwell on this, Chair, but again, what is the most significant difference between then and now? Majority or minority.

When we were in a minority, no one party—not the Liberals, not the NDP, not the Conservatives, and not the Bloc—could command and ram through a motion without at least one of the other parties being onside.

●(1950)

Mr. Pat Martin: It's better government.

Mr. David Christopherson: That changes the dynamics of committee work overwhelmingly.

Now, did it slow things down a little? I guess, but would you call it a waste and say that the amount of work we did on the Chief Electoral Officer's report wasn't worth doing? I wouldn't make that statement. I'd be shocked. I'm ready to hear it if it's there, but I haven't heard anybody who participated say that it wasn't an excellent process or that we weren't doing good work, and that we weren't doing everything we could to be non-partisan and working just as members of the House.

Our motion is here because that's not where we are. It's where we should be, but that's not where we are, so over and over again, I keep coming back to my motion, because that's what's in front of us. I keep coming back to the three component parts. They all fit together. The only thing that's missing is the respect and political will we need from the government so that we can do this.

They can declare all the victories they want, Chair, if we get there. I have no problem with that. What we want is to get down to work.

I can't go far on this right now, but make no mistake, we know the game plan. The government's motion is going to be in front of us whenever they can manage to get it there, and let me tell you, somebody should start taking a look at that motion because it provides no details. It doesn't talk at all about what's going to be done. It just leaves it completely blank and talks about the endgame.

That's about all I can say now and still stay in order, but in terms of this process that's where we're going. There is me, with the floor, and then when that changes, Mr. Lukiwski gets the floor. He moves a motion and kills this motion dead by using their majority, with no debate. I guarantee you that it'll be a motion that's non-debatable, and he'll move it because he has the floor next, and then this motion is effectively dead.

Then he's going to move their motion, which provides no details, no outline of where to go, and gives them full control. That's the game plan. I guarantee you that there's a whole flood of them who, at the end of that little rant, will be ready to just burst up and down and applaud and say that's great, because that's the way they view this. They view this as an endgame, and the endgame is that they get to keep power no matter what.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I have a point of order on relevancy.

The Chair: I have to agree with you on that, Mr. Lukiwski, but he started through his own motion before he got to yours, so I'll let him go.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thanks, Chair.

I won't stay long on it, because I know I can't, but I thank you. I do appreciate that. I do think it's fair to acknowledge to everybody what's going on here and what the expected steps are. If I'm wrong, fine. We'll watch how things unfold. If I owe somebody an apology, just point me in that direction, and I will do it.

But I doubt that will happen. That's exactly what they're going to do. Then they're going to try to keep us here as long as they can on their motion, so that by the time this committee rises, they have the motion they want that rams this through the committee the way they want, just the way they rammed it through the House. When they rammed it through the House, they said the reason that it had to come to committee was that committee is where the real work happens, and it would have effectively killed any possibility for any Canadian to penetrate the Ottawa security bubble to have their say—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Again, I have a point of order, Chair, on relevancy. We know his opinion of us and what's happening.

Let's talk to his motion, please.

The Chair: I'll agree.

Let's go to the motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

The motion is here to provide, hopefully, an antidote to that, but that's where we're heading. Anybody who is watching this should do up their seat belt, because my motion is going to disappear the first chance this government gets. The next speaker on my motion—on my motion, I have the floor now—is the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader. He will move a motion that allows him to use the tyranny of the majority to shut us down.

Mr. Peter Julian: Shame.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Once again, Chair, I ask the relevance. I thought we were talking about Mr. Christopherson's motion and not —

Mr. David Christopherson: I am, and I talked how this government is going to kill it. I am entirely relevant. When I start talking about yours, I get on thin ice. That's fair enough. I said that, but I'm talking about my motion and what this government intends to do using its majority. It's going to run over it.

The Chair: Thank you.

When there's a point of order, I answer it. You did a great job of answering it, but as the chair, I get to do that.

Mr. David Christopherson: Believe me, the last thing I want to do is jump in when I don't have to. I apologize. Please, carry on, sir.

The Chair: I'm going to tell you to carry on now. I'm just pointing out to you that I get to play that—

Mr. David Christopherson: Yes, you do. It was purely a mistake. I wasn't challenging your authority. I wouldn't do that. I might respectfully if I were making a counterpoint, but I would not show blatant disrespect like that.

The Chair: I think we can find a record of that, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, I wasn't that bad. Come on. It cuts both ways. Let's be fair.

However, I do think—and I'll give you a chance to tell me if I'm wrong—it seems to me I am in order to at least speculate for less than a minute on what I think the government is about to do to my motion. That's all I was doing.

The Chair: It is.

Mr. David Christopherson: I won't comment on the other—

The Chair: It rubs against relevance, but go ahead.

Mr. David Christopherson: Well, the procedure might, but I hear your point, sir, and I will not mention that motion again other than to say that if that passes, that's the endgame. They have total grip control. They had it in the House. They said they would show democracy here in the committee. They haven't. People have to wake up to what's going on, or this thing is going through. That's what's going to happen. They are going to get the floor.

Are they going to actually engage in my motion? That's not going to happen.

• (1955)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I ask for the relevancy again. Mr. Christopherson just said he wanted to speak for a moment. I think it's been closer to five minutes or six minutes not on his motion but on what he suspects will happen after he gives up the floor.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: On a point of order, it is unprecedented in the history of Canada that the government would use its majority to try to shut down debate on a change to the fundamental rules of our democracy. That's what this is about. This bill would change the fundamental rules of our democracy.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Chair, has Mr. Mulcair been sworn in?

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Yes, I have, Tom. Poor you.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I was just asking. You weren't the last time.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Well, he's the chair, you see. He's the chair. He just asked you before to show respect for the chair, so show respect for the chair.

The Chair: Let's keep it through the chair, and then we'll all be respectful. That would be—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: There you go.

The Chair: In real reality, Mr. Mulcair—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: That's what I was saying to you—

The Chair: Let me finish, please.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Oh, I see. I thought you had recognized me.

The Chair: No.

In real reality, the member who you've sworn in for is still in the room and so, in fact, she's still recognized—

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I see.

The Chair: —but I'll give you a very short finish to your point of order.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: Thank you. I do appreciate your opening on that with regard to the difference between “real reality”, as you just said, and “reality”, so let's stay with that theme.

The reality is that this is the first time in the history of Canada the government has tried to use its majority to shut down debate on the Canada Elections Act.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mulcair. You're well beyond a point of order.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: You should be ashamed to be part of it.

The Chair: We'll move on to Mr. Christopherson and his speech on his motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: I think I'm doing well, Chair. I went from impasse to motion and now speech, so I'm still in the good books to that degree.

I thought I would—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: A point of order, Mr. Chair...

Mr. David Christopherson: I guess I won't.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: On a point of order, Mr. Mulcair was saying he was sworn in, and of course, you pointed out quite correctly that the person he was supposed to be replacing was still in the room, so technically he was not allowed to speak. Am I correct on that?

Now I know the NDP has asked Madame Latendresse to leave the room.

The Chair: That is the procedure, Mr. Lukiwski, but we're not there now, so let's move on.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: So he was not in order when he was making his remarks.

The Chair: I'll go along with you on that.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: I might not have been in order, but I was right.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'm sure in your opinion you're always right, Tom.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson—

I'm sorry, Mr. Martin, would you like to add your short dissertation to that same point of order?

Mr. Pat Martin: As a fellow chair, I would like clarification on the reasoning of Mr. Lukiwski. He seems to have a lot to say about the rules of order as they pertain to parliamentary committees, but I've always been under the understanding that when someone is subbed in properly with a substitution sheet, etc., as long as that person has backed away from the table, they are allowed to continue to be in the room.

Do you conduct your committee differently at procedure and House affairs?

I wonder if the clerk would clarify that for me for future reference, because I intend to speak on this motion. I'm on the list, and hope springs eternal that somewhere before dawn I will get an opportunity to speak on this motion. I need to know these rules too as we substitute further for personal breaks, etc.

The Chair: Mr. Martin, at your committee you have a clerk too, and you could certainly ask them for all of that information.

Mr. Pat Martin: Yes, but I won't be seeing him before I speak on this motion, so when it comes to substituting back and forth—

The Chair: You may have to ask David that.

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Lukiwski seems to know it all. He seems to be helping you to chair the meeting here.

Tom, maybe I should be asking you this. Isn't it true that in most committees, if you sub somebody in, as long as the person is backed away from the table it's the person who has the pink slip in their favour?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I'll defer to the chair, Pat. Come on, now.

Mr. Pat Martin: You seem to know everything, Tom.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I know just a little bit more than you in this case, Pat, yes.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair: We're going to have lots of pink slips for the Conservatives at the next election.

The Chair: Excuse me, gentlemen.

Please, not across the table but perhaps through the chair. I don't really want it either, but through the chair is better.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well, chair to chair, with all due respect—

The Chair: Mr. Martin, the rule truly is that if someone is signed in but the member is still in the room, then they are the recognized member. However, any member at the table can speak if the committee allows them to and recognizes them.

So there are a couple of different ways in which members can speak at the table. Those are two. In the case where we're at, I've given you why I've made my ruling.

Mr. Pat Martin: This is a televised meeting, and I don't want to let the permanent record stand that Tom Lukiwski says that the leader of my party was out of order in the intervention he made.

Will you agree that Mr. Mulcair was in fact in order in participating in the point of order that Tom put forward, and that you in fact recognized him?

The Chair: Mr. Martin, I'm not certain whether I care whether you like what I've said or not said.

Mr. Pat Martin: I didn't say I didn't like it. I said I want you to rule on whether or not he was in order.

• (2000)

The Chair: This is a lot like one of your predecessors sitting there.

I think when I start to give a ruling, you should at least give respect to the chair and let me finish speaking.

Mr. Pat Martin: If that's what you're intending to do, by all means take your time.

The Chair: I've told you what the position is with regard to when a member can speak in this room, and I've given you those positions.

We'll carry on with Mr. Christopherson, on debate.

Mr. Pat Martin: The point I'm not satisfied with, Mr. Chairman, is that I don't want the permanent record to show, as Lukiwski alleges, that the leader of my party was out of order when he participated in the point of order put forward by Tom Lukiwski.

Was he or was he not in order?

This is a televised meeting, with a permanent record associated with it. We're not in camera. I want to know that the points that my leader made are valid and will be on the permanent record here, and that he was in order.

The Chair: I've given you my opinion that if the member who has been substituted for is still in the room, they're the one legally here to speak—

A voice: To be recognized.

The Chair: —to be recognized.

Mr. Pat Martin: Well—

The Chair: That member was still here. I afforded the respect to Mr. Mulcair at the time and said go ahead. Fine; done.

Mr. Pat Martin: So his point is null and void. It's moot.

The Chair: No. I have already ruled that it was exactly correct. I was showing respect and was allowing Mr. Mulcair to speak.

At this committee generally we will show that type of respect. You're testing it, though, Mr. Martin.

I'll go back to Mr. Christopherson on his debate.

Mr. Pat Martin: It had the desired effect.

A voice: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Mr. Pat Martin: What did we learn here? I want to know.

The Chair: Do you know what I learned, Mr. Martin?

Mr. Pat Martin: What did you learn?

The Chair: You're not signed in and can't speak at this committee.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Pat Martin: I was going to volunteer that...unless recognized by the chair, unless properly recognized by the chair.

The Chair: I will ignore you completely now and go on to Mr. Christopherson, because I feel like I should.

Mr. Pat Martin: I knew I wasn't signed in—

The Chair: It's better when he's invisible.

Go ahead, Mr. Christopherson.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's not nice.

Mr. David Christopherson: I've been pointing out different aspects of my arguments in support of my motion. Specifically I've broken it down into the three main components of my motion.

It's a little too soon for me to read it again.

The Chair: Probably.

Mr. David Christopherson: There will come a time because it will be so many hours after, but for now I won't. But I will again continue to point out why these three segments, pieces of the motion, are important.

If I might, I'll just go back a bit. If you can bear with me, Chair, I think you'll be comfortable with why. Mr. Michael LeClair was kind enough to contact us through Mr. Scott's Facebook, and he was generous to invite us, and all the Islanders are friendly like that so I'm not surprised at all. He'd probably invite us over to his house to have a bite to eat and talk about things, and maybe even talk about election laws. You never know.

What is important, and I should have known, and I apologize to my fellow Canadians in Charlottetown, is that apparently this is the 150th anniversary of the Charlottetown Conference. I can't think of a better way to celebrate that than to have this committee arrive during the 150th celebration of the Charlottetown Conference—it laid the foundation for our nation—and to be there to talk about and hopefully improve our election laws.

There are a number of spots across Canada that can claim some ownership to part of our founding, but those of us who have been lucky enough to be in Charlottetown and to experience everything there is to see there historically, it is very moving. It's not very big. It's not small, but the importance to Canadians is monumental. In recognizing that significant accomplishment in Charlottetown and

the conference 150 years ago, I would just like to go back to my point and add to it about how Charlottetown would be ideal. There may be some other places, too, across Canada that are celebrating certain aspects of Canadiana that would allow us to not only do good work, not only improve our elections law, not only listen to Canadians, but help support and celebrate the history of our great country.

There are so many things that could come, benefit-wise, from our actually making the decision to get out of the bubble here and listen to people.

I haven't had a chance yet to mention how cool it would be to go to Winnipeg. I love Winnipeg.

● (2005)

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, we have bells, so we will suspend until we reconvene after the bells at 268 La Promenade.

● (2005)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (2130)

The Chair: I will call this meeting to order, since I see that we have everyone here. We are in public.

Mr. Christopherson, you had the floor when we last saw each other, not that long ago. You have done a great job so far today, but let's see what we can do now.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair.

For a slight change of pace, we've been looking at the situation, and it's clear that the government is very determined. They're going to use every trick possible to keep this committee going to the point at which they get their final motion.

My voice will hold up. Whether I can continue with enough relevant information is the question, as colleagues who have done this before will know. There might be a few more hours left, but to what end? Particularly, just being ruled out of order and losing the floor because I no longer had anything that was allowable to say is not very appealing. However, if we aren't able to reach some kind of understanding, that will be where we are, and we'll pick up at that point, Chair.

I appreciate your flexibility now, because we're talking about something very different. Should we get back in there, then we'll be back into staying within the lines and colouring. We'll all be back there.

However, there have been some discussions between the government and ourselves and Mr. Lamoureux with a view to talking about an endgame for the way this will conclude.

It has been mentioned—we haven't focused on it, but it's our understanding—that Mr. Mayrand has offered to be available on Thursday. Inasmuch as we have heard already from the minister, we think it's important that we get Mr. Mayrand's comments and thoughts into the process to provide some balance, because the government, of course, has the means to corral more quotes than the opposition. That's not a slam. That's just the reality.

Further to that, I'm the first one to acknowledge when there is checkmate. In terms of achieving our goal, which was to force the government to change their mind and allow public hearings outside of Ottawa, it is abundantly clear that, as wrong-headed as that is, the government is bloody-minded about it and will use every authority and tyranny that the majority has to ensure that they get the outcome they want. At that point, our ability to influence anything is very slim, if it exists at all.

So there are a couple of things to state. Number one, given the fact that the government is absolutely refusing to hear from Canadians outside of the Ottawa bubble, I'm advising colleagues on all sides that we'll hold our own hearings. We won't be able to do as extensive a set of hearings and won't be able to do as many as this committee could if it were sponsoring them, but clearly it's our view that those are not going to happen, that the government is bloody-minded about it. They have made a determination of timeframes, and come hell or high water, that's what they're going to do. We have used virtually every parliamentary trick we can think of to try to force the government.

That's the key thing. We wanted to get a change. After 30 years, I'm not looking for a headline. I'm looking for results.

So in advising that if certain conditions are met I would be prepared to forego the floor, the first thing is to advise that we will be holding our own hearings. If the government refuses to talk to Canadians, then we will.

Secondly, the opposition parties have had a chance to talk, and we're all of a view that it's imperative to hear Mr. Mayrand.

• (2135)

What we would be looking for is some discussion, Chair, from the government, some assurances regarding how we're going to proceed in terms of selecting the number days that we would meet and the witnesses because the motion is really general and bad to the extent that there's no specificity. Given that we're in the grip of the majority, we would like, at least—and I don't think it's unfair to ask the government for assurances—that you publicly state them so we can hold you to account to your word that the process for the number of days and the number of witnesses, unlike the process so far, will be a lot more balanced, fair, and allow for legitimate input and time from the NDP and the Liberals.

It's my suggestion to the government that if they can give us those assurances—we'll be listening carefully to the words chosen—publicly regarding the number of days and witness selection.... To be fair, Mr. Lukiwski has made some of those commitments before. A lot of what we'd be seeking would be a repeat; hopefully you'll allow it. It would be concise and related to what I'm offering right now.

I want to say, in fairness, that we could find ourselves still doing this, but I want to thank Mr. Lamoureux who, like us, is more concerned about the bill and the contents and getting something done than about headlines. It's my understanding that, collectively, we can make an offer that we're prepared to stand behind. Much will depend, Mr. Lukiwski, on the words that you use and assurances that you can give us, up to and including what you propose Thursday would look like given that we're looking for at least an hour and a half of Mr. Mayrand in front of the committee.

We'd be interested to know how you'd suggest proceeding if we had a deal, which we do not right now but I am attempting to lay out some of the pieces of what a deal could look like.

Unless there's anything I've left out or that you'd like to add...?

• (2140)

Mr. Craig Scott: Just procedurally, as long as you still have the floor....

Mr. David Christopherson: I believe I do. I think I have that.

The Chair: Before you give up the floor, we still have to do something with your motion.

Mr. David Christopherson: I know, but I would ask for your consideration, or maybe if you need unanimous consent, to allow Mr. Lukiwski a chance to respond, and assuming he doesn't go too long, I get the floor back.

That would be funny if he took over and started....

I trust you, Chair, and I've done many deals with Mr. Lukiwski and never once have I been stabbed in the back. I have no reason to believe that would happen now.

The Chair: Since we're all honourable gentlemen and we've all heard what Mr. Christopherson's said, I'll offer Mr. Lukiwski a chance to respond.

Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thanks very much.

David, I appreciate it. I appreciate the fact that you and I and Kevin have, I think, come to some agreement on this. That's all I've really been looking for from day one.

I won't be very long, but on a couple of your points, yes, I would welcome and the government would welcome Monsieur Mayrand to appear on Thursday. We'll have to obviously have that confirmed by the clerk and the chair, but we certainly have no objection to that. I, like you, think it would only be appropriate. We've heard from the minister first, and Monsieur Mayrand, as the Chief Electoral Officer of Elections Canada, should appropriately be the second witness we hear from.

The government's position is yes. I think what you're suggesting, an hour and a half of Monsieur Mayrand in front of this committee, would certainly be appropriate.

Mr. David Christopherson: For the first time....

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, and if we decide to invite him back again, that will be a committee decision, but certainly an hour and a half on Thursday, assuming he's available, would be acceptable to the government. I think we need half an hour at the end of the meeting to discuss future committee business to talk about things like witnesses, scheduling of meetings, and the like.

Let me recommit to you and let me reconfirm what I've already said publicly. And I said this at the outset: the government's position has always been that all we want to do is get on with the hearings and hear from witnesses. We have no plans and we certainly have no master design to try to restrict the amount of witnesses coming forward. I've stated from the outset that any reasonable witness would be accepted by the government. In terms of how long that may take, it all depends, obviously, on how many witnesses end up on the final list.

My motion, however—and this is the only deal, and we have discussed this—needs to be passed tonight.

That motion—even though you, David, may not think it is worded appropriately—basically says “witnesses to be determined by [this] Committee at a later date”, which we will start doing on Thursday, I hope, and says that clause-by-clause be completed by May 1. That's contained in my motion, which we will have to vote on tonight, and if we have that passed, then you will see certainly no obstruction and no objection from the government.

With respect to Mr. Lamoureux, David, you've been quite impressive, frankly, in speaking for about seven and a half or eight hours. Having been in the position of filibustering on several occasions in the past, I know the difficulty that this entails. I know the stamina that you need to have to do a filibuster of that length. I also know, quite frankly, that this speaks to your eloquence and your intelligence. You have to be able to be focused, particularly on a motion. This is not a piece of legislation where you have an expansive range of topics that you can discuss.

The chair I think did a fairly good job of keeping you funnelled in, but that's not an easy task, so quite frankly, just from one colleague to another, I congratulate you. I think you did an excellent job on that. You represented your party very well.

Monsieur Lamoureux, however, has not had that opportunity, because you didn't cede the floor. My understanding is that Mr. Lamoureux, on behalf of the Liberal Party, would like to make some comments, either on the motion that Mr. Christopherson brought forward or—I would frankly suggest that we might even give him a little bit more latitude than that—in speaking towards my motion.

We have agreed upon about a 30-minute timeline, Kevin, for you to give some comments. We're agreeable to that, again, all with the proviso—and we'll have to do this procedurally, of course—that my motion is approved.

With that, how I see this unfolding, David, is this. I'll give you again my public commitment, if you cede the floor. I'm the next speaker and I will make the appropriate motion that debate be adjourned on your motion. Then it will come over to my motion. I don't propose to speak to that whatsoever. I think it's fairly self-explanatory. At that time, Mr. Lamoureux, I believe, is the next speaker on the list, and I would cede the floor to him to give him his 30 minutes.

If at the end of that time, Chair, if you can be the watcher of the clock—

• (2145)

The Chair: I will.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: —we'll go back to my motion, vote on that, and then dispense with the procedural duties we have before us. Hopefully by then we'll be able to begin our committee hearings on Thursday.

The Chair: Mr. Christopherson, it's back to you. You have the floor.

Mr. David Christopherson: Thank you, Chair. Thank you so much for accommodating the dialogue. It's nice to have some level of trust and to see it honoured.

There's just one little bit, if I might, Chair, on the time, because one can deny witnesses either directly or by just running out of time.

If you wouldn't mind just acknowledging that we're not necessarily bound by just Tuesdays and Thursdays in order to meet your timeframe, but also our desire for witnesses, the Liberals' desire and yours.... In order to accommodate and fulfill the pledge that I think you're making tonight—at least that's the way I'm interpreting it—then I'd just like some assurance that the government is not going to stand on Tuesday and Thursday and go make it fit, that there will be a recognition that if this committee wants to exercise its right to hold meetings every day or at night, whatever it takes....

I'm not saying that's what we have to do, but I just want to make sure that I'm not going to hear, “Sorry, we only meet Tuesdays and Thursdays, and for anything other than that, we're into another problem.” So if I could hear some indication, not necessarily that we'll be meeting every day, but that conversely there won't be a lock-in to Tuesday and Thursday for two hours each and that's it....

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: David, let me put it this way. If I could have guarantees that I won't have to listen to you for another eight hours straight, you'll have any commitment from us.

Mr. David Christopherson: Colleagues, it worked.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Listen, all kidding aside—and I say this publicly to you at the outset—if we need to sit extended hours to accommodate the witness list, we will not be restricting it to merely Tuesdays and Thursdays from eleven to one. We will try to collectively work out, as a committee, times, meeting locations, dates, and everything to accommodate the entire witness list. We're not trying to put any kibosh on that, whatsoever.

I don't think I could be much clearer, David. That's my commitment. I've said it before and I'll say it again, and I certainly have no problem with saying it publicly.

Mr. David Christopherson: Kevin, you're good? I'm checking to see if you're good with where we are so far. Yes?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I'm just a little anxious, David.

Mr. David Christopherson: No, that's fine. It's not like you haven't waited long enough for your turn.

The Chair: You've been anxious for a long time.

Mr. David Christopherson: Okay.

Well, this time it's definitely more in sorrow than in anger that I suggest to the government, Chair, through you and to you, that based on the discussions we've had, if you can move us through the procedures to give effect to what we've talked about, then it's going to be up to us and you as parliamentarians to honour the commitments we're all making here, some of them short-term, some of them longer-term. Then I think we have a chance to at least pull some dignity out of this process, and perhaps at the very least the discussions we'll have with witnesses will be a little closer to having the kind of honour that citizens look for from us.

I remain optimistic, not because there's evidence to be so on this bill but because of the understanding we have that's very clear now. I would hope that it's beyond this government to even contemplate going against this, because, quite frankly, we are entering into a deal of honour. So it's with great reluctance but acceptance of the chessboard that I do relinquish the floor.

• (2150)

The Chair: Great.

Thank you, Mr. Christopherson.

I'll try to get this right, and I'll get poked if I don't, I think. Mr. Christopherson has given the floor to Mr. Lukiwski on Mr. Christopherson's motion.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Yes, Chair, and I'll keep this very simple and quick.

I move that the debate on this motion be adjourned.

The Chair: That is not debatable.

(Motion agreed to on division)

The Chair: The next order of business was Mr. Lukiwski's motion. It's been distributed and you all have it. Mr. Lukiwski has said he does not want to speak to it, and we'll give the floor to—

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I need to move the motion, Mr. Chair.

If you wish, colleagues, I can read it into the record. If you don't—

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Dispense with that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That's fine.

Let me just say again before I cede the floor to Kevin, that all we as a government have ever wanted is to conduct hearings to examine the bill in its totality by hearing witnesses. We have gotten to the point now that satisfies our desire. We want a thorough examination of the bill. The minister has stated, on at least one occasion that I'm aware of, that he'd even consider amendments that he thought could improve the bill. So there's no trying to hijack the situation. We're not trying to rush this bill through Parliament. We want an extensive examination in committee where it should be, and I'm very pleased to have this agreement before us today.

So, with that, Chair, I think I'll cede my time to Mr. Lamoureux and I believe, as we discussed earlier and agreed, that Mr. Lamoureux will have 30 minutes, at which time I expect we will be back to my motion for the final vote.

The Chair: Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

It has been a while since I've been afforded the opportunity to actually address the issue before us. There are a number of concerns we have expressed over the days, both formally and informally, in different types of discussions.

I appreciate the fact, Mr. Chair, we do have an agreement that will ultimately see us at least deal with the government's motion. I do believe the government's intent was, if there was no agreement, to force this issue through. I'm glad, in the sense that I'm anticipating now that we'll be able to make some decisions in terms of being able to deal from a steering committee's perspective with the issue of witnesses. We do have witnesses, too, that we would like to come before the committee.

Having said that, there are a number of concerns I would really like to expand upon. The biggest one is just dealing with the process followed by the legislation. I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson, in many ways we have to concede the fact that we've lost opportunities here.

We've lost opportunities to deliver a better electoral system to Canadians by the manner in which the bill has been introduced, gone into committee, and will ultimately pass. It's going to go that way because there is a Conservative majority government. They are prepared to use that majority even at the cost of what I believe is important to all Canadians, and that's that sense of fairness in our democratic system.

To go over the process, what we're talking about here is our election laws. We have to put it in the perspective, I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson, in terms of the lack of confidence Canadians have, and you cannot blame them given what has taken place since 2011. There have been all sorts of media reports, issues, everything from the robocalls to the in-and-out scandal, to campaign over-expenditures, allegations of cheating, and so forth, all of which I believe has undermined the confidence the public has in our election laws. There is a responsibility for the government to address it. The manner in which they have chosen to do that, Mr. Chairperson, I believe is wrong-headed.

Let's go back in terms of what an obligation is, and I say this, Mr. Chairperson, because I have in a different capacity had the opportunity to work with independent election authorities in the past, in particular Elections Manitoba. So I'm very much familiar with the processing, and how we now have a motion before us today that is just a continuation of an attitude the government has in regard to what I would suggest to you is an assault on true democratic process on very critically important legislation, part of the cornerstone or one of those pillars of our democratic foundation.

What would typically happen, Mr. Chair, is that the independent election authority would be treated with respect and afforded the opportunity to be able to work with different political parties and other stakeholders with the idea of improving our election laws.

Now what we'll see is that Elections Canada did go out of its way in terms of being able to accommodate different changes that could be put into the legislation, and there have been tangible suggestions that have come from Elections Canada. For whatever reasons, Mr. Chairperson, the government has chosen to ignore those.

One of the most significant ones was that Elections Canada was requesting, for example, the ability to compel witnesses. This is something that was of critical importance. We all know that. All political parties were very much aware of that fact, and the government has intentionally left that out. In fact, Mr. Chairperson, they have compounded the problem through the division that was caused with the commissioner and Elections Canada.

● (2155)

There should have been a reaching out to the election authority. There should have been a reaching out by the government to the different stakeholders, and I would ultimately argue, to the opposition parties. That never occurred. What we have before us is a bill that was introduced at second reading. I believe there were two, possibly three, individuals who were afforded the opportunity to address the bill. Shortly after that—I think the third speaker might have finished—the government House leader stood up and moved a motion of time allocation, in essence a form of closure, again, Mr. Chairperson, without any sense of obligation to allow opposition parties to convey the thoughts they have in regard to the bill.

Then—and I believe it was maybe not in this particular room but in La Promenade—we actually met the first time with the committee and we had a discussion about having the minister come forward. What I found very strange about that whole discussion was that in previous committees we were supposed to sit down and have some dialogue as to how the committee would like to deal with the legislation. The government, working with the New Democrats—because, if you recall, I did not agree to it—came to a consensus that we would have the minister come and appear before the committee. We had always believed that it was better to try to get the business at hand done before we would actually have the minister come before the committee.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson, that from my perspective the steering committee was just not doing its job. It does have a responsibility to the public to ensure that there's some justice in how the legislation is actually being brought into the committee.

I'm hopeful, given the comments both now and prior to the committee getting together, that in fact we will see exceptional goodwill to ensure that all parties will feel content with the number of witnesses that have been called and will be afforded the opportunity to have those witnesses actually appear or at least be offered the opportunity to appear before the committee. We're going to be looking in particular for Mr. Lukiwski's support in regard to that issue.

Mr. Chairperson, where we disagree with the government and the particular motion that has been brought forward is the whole idea of May 1, 2014. Why are we putting this time in place at this point? I don't believe and the Liberal Party does not believe that we should be putting in a date. There is no urgency that says to us that we have to have this legislation passed through here and that the drop-dead date is in fact May 1.

I appreciate that members have made reference to Elections Canada and some of the comments that they have provided, but at the end of the day, this legislation is far too important, and I don't think we should be attempting to limit it in any fashion. If it goes past May 1, we should be open to May 1. I don't believe it's

necessary for us to actually have May 1 put into the motion itself. Let's get the committee up and running, but doing that, I do think, would be a mistake.

● (2200)

I would like to believe, in the spirit of goodwill, that we will see a sense of generosity coming from the government in regard to the number of hours that we are going to be able to have as a committee in order to be able to deal with this issue, in terms of the presenters and the clause-by-clause.

We're hopeful. I think it's very important that it gets communicated to the Prime Minister's Office and the minister responsible that there needs to be changes to the legislation. This legislation as it currently stands should not pass, period. We want to see, and believe, that the government has to approach this with an open mind. It's better not to pass this legislation at all, period, then to allow it to continue in its current form and become the law of the land. That would not be appropriate.

We are encouraging in the strongest possible way we can that the minister and the PMO be aware of the fact that there needs to be amendments to the legislation. Some of those amendments could be fairly substantial in their nature. I made reference in terms of the compelling of witnesses. This is something that we've argued for in second reading. This is something that Elections Canada has argued for. This is something that other election authorities in Canada, in my home province, already have the authority to do. There is no real reason for us to deny Elections Canada and the commission the authority to be able to compel a witness. It would be wonderful, the government would be doing a good thing, if in fact it would recognize that particular flaw within the legislation.

The division is an issue. The commissioner is a big issue, in terms of taking it out of Elections Canada. These are the types of presentations that we believe we're going to be hearing a lot about as we go into the committee. That's why it's very important when we see the motion putting a fixed date that everything has to be done by May 1. There are certain aspects, Mr. Chair, that I believe we need to articulate, and articulate well, when the time comes. Whether it's through the presenters who come here or when it comes time for us to talk about the clause-by-clause of the legislation itself, we need to feel that there is not going to be the type of time constraints that are going to continue to demonstrate disrespect for what is absolutely critical legislation, as I pointed out earlier, one of those cornerstones, one of those pillars of our democratic system.

We are not happy with the process to date. We recognize that the government is absolutely 100% determined to get this motion through. Somewhat sympathetic to the frustration that others might feel around the table in terms of why it is that ultimately..and it will pass because they do have that majority, Mr. Chairperson, but it is not the way to go.

As for the issue of going outside of Ottawa, you talk about lost opportunities, Mr. Chairperson, this is something I think is one of the more significant mistakes that PROC as a committee collectively will make because we are not acknowledging the importance of going outside of Ottawa.

I don't want to claim to understand why it is the government is so fearful of going outside of Ottawa. If I was to speculate I suspect that maybe in different locations there might be some people who have fairly hard opinions, in terms of the last few years and the violation of election laws, and might want to come out and participate in some fashion or another, Mr. Chairperson. Sometimes it might not be all positive, but we are a democratic society. We have to allow for individuals in communities across our country to be able to express themselves.

• (2205)

It's not just that we want a presenter to be able to come to the committee so the presenter can express themselves in the city of Winnipeg, or in Calgary, Montreal, or Halifax. That's an important aspect of it, Mr. Chair, but there are other benefits when the committee goes out. If we're going out into those communities, committee members are afforded the opportunity to meet with local individuals who are concerned about the legislation and to have that one-on-one dialogue with people who are concerned about the legislation.

There are people who will present. There are other people who will participate in different ways, maybe just by sitting in on the meetings and listening. They're afforded the opportunity to meet with a number of MPs who have been charged with the responsibility of being able to usher this legislation through. It's a wonderful thing from a public relations point of view for members of Parliament to be able to communicate with Canadians on such a critically important piece of legislation.

In Ottawa.... I hear about the national media, and the national media no doubt does a wonderful job in terms of reporting out of Ottawa, but there's a lot of local media in our communities that would welcome the opportunity to listen in. They might not necessarily have the budget to be able to come to Ottawa, especially if you start talking about things like the ethnic media. Ethnic media is very important. Also, a lot of those rural community newspapers are very important media outlets. They don't have their reporters here.

Why is it important, Mr. Chair, to take the media into consideration? It's primarily because that's the way in which we communicate quite often to the larger masses of individuals. For many Canadians, the opportunity to get a better understanding is through that local media.

Mr. Chairperson, if you could give me a five-minute warning, I would appreciate it.

The Chair: I will do so.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: So having that opportunity to be able to go to that local media and sit down and have those interviews I think is exceptionally beneficial. It serves the whole system I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson.

At the beginning of my remarks, I made reference to the last number of years and all the media attention related to the robocalls, the in-and-out scandal, allegations of cheating, the overspending. All of that stuff has been reported on extensively, Mr. Chairperson. We need...and I believe we saw it in particular in regard to the number of people who have called in, in one fashion or another, to Elections

Canada. We're not talking about a few thousand. We're talking about tens of thousands. I've heard that over 30,000 people have actually made concerning calls to Elections Canada.

So there is this, as I pointed out earlier, lack of confidence in the electoral system that's being perpetrated by actions here in Ottawa and by candidates in the most recent election. To be able to do what I would suggest to you is public relations, we could be a very positive committee. I haven't been on the PROC committee for very long. I am told.... Joe, you have commented on how wonderful this committee has been in the past in being able to move forward on some very important issues.

If I look at this issue, it is a very important issue. I think that we have lost the opportunity to be able as a committee to do something good for Canadians, by not allowing us to go coast to coast to coast. There are many communities that would have benefited directly from us having that physical presence in those communities. That's why I say it's sad in the sense that it is a huge loss in terms of an opportunity.

We take a look at it and at the end of the day I would like to think that it's never too late. As Mr. Christopherson, David, talked about, it's amazing what we can do with unanimous support, whether it's of the committee or it's of the House. If individuals could be as optimistic as someone like me and say, "Look, we can turn this thing around and put it back on to the right track", I believe that we could actually salvage some good here. In fact if we're committed to recognizing that the legislation does have some deficiencies.... To a certain degree the minister has himself indicated this because during that second reading, he seemed to indicate that there could be some deficiency in the legislation.

If we get some mild recognition of those deficiencies and then we have the presentations that will be coming out—and there will be a number of presentations. I suspect what we'll be hearing, Mr. Chairperson, is a great deal of talk about how we can improve the legislation. The critical thing here is going to be how open we are as a committee to listen to what's being said, and not only listen but to actually act upon it. That's going to be the greatest challenge I believe, Mr. Chairperson.

When I look at the record to date and you reflect on the process, you reflect on the content of the legislation, there's reason for us to be concerned, very much concerned. I do believe that there is a responsibility for us, as much as possible, to try to move this thing forward.

• (2210)

The best way we can do that, I believe, is by looking at it. Let's start from the beginning. Who should we be looking at? I made a suggestion through points of order before of some of the other independent election authorities. During the 1990s an incident came up in the Manitoba election. They called it a vote-rigging scandal at the time. It ultimately led to a report to the Manitoba legislature, but an independent commission was put in place and a series of recommendations made. A number of those recommendations were acted on. I think there might be some benefit for us as a committee to be able to hear from the former chief electoral officer from the province of Manitoba.

Why not hear? When I talked about the compelling evidence for Elections Canada to have the ability to compel evidence, members might be surprised at how many provinces currently have that ability: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, I've already mentioned Manitoba, Yukon. Maybe we should be looking at some of those jurisdictions and saying why not have one or two of them come forward. After all, Mr. Chairperson, our own Chief Electoral Officer wanted to see this happen.

We like to think that if you violate an election law that at the end of the day Elections Canada will have enough power and authority to be able to investigate the situation and ensure there is some form of a consequence in a timely fashion. I would underline the words "a timely fashion". It is not good enough for Elections Canada to identify a potential problem and not have the ability to investigate it because someone says they can't recall or they don't have the time to make a presentation. Nothing allows Elections Canada to compel them to testify. Other jurisdictions have that ability. When Elections Canada wants that, why are we not allowing them to be able to have that? Other independent electoral authorities already do.

If you believe we need to have teeth in the legislation, we need to make that amendment, we need to make that change. I don't want when the time comes because we stretched it out and then there's a great deal of debate on certain parts of the legislation and all of a sudden May 1 comes and we have to pass that particular portion. Mr. Chairperson, that's the fear. We should be able to feel comfortable knowing that it's more important for us to make the necessary changes. We don't need a deadline of May 1. That's why it is so important that we approach this thing with an open mind.

I'm anxious. I want to see the presenters. That's one of the reasons why, and trust me it was not easy for me to say that I'll forgo my three-hour shift tonight that I was anticipating in order to address some of the concerns, and condense it into 30 minutes. Mr. Chairperson, at the end of the day I do want to see the presentations begin. But I'm very much concerned that we are selling ourselves short as a committee by putting in the motion, which we are going to be asked to vote on and which you can tell, Mr. Chairperson, I won't be in favour of... But to put in May 1 is wrong, I believe.

When you take a look at the witnesses who come before us I suspect we are going to see a number of changes. Just the other day we heard from media outlets that members of Parliament are going to have more authority to see some appointments. Isn't this something Elections Canada should be doing more of?

• (2215)

When I reflect on the way in which things were evolving in my home province of Manitoba, it seemed to be evolving more toward giving Elections Manitoba more authority, more power, because we had faith in Elections Manitoba.

I would suggest to you, Mr. Chairperson, that we need to demonstrate that we have faith and that we believe in Elections Canada. I think more organizations in countries around the world recognize the true independence of Elections Canada because they are constantly in contact with Elections Canada. They are looking for more information from Elections Canada. Here, with the legislation we're seeing—we're going to hear this in some of the presentations—we're telling Elections Canada that we don't want them to go out and

do certain types of advertising. We're trying to hold the hand, in certain ways, of Elections Canada.

These are the types of concerns we have that we believe need to be amended in the legislation. These are the types of concerns that we believe presenters will be coming forward with. This is the reason why, if you look at Elections Canada and the role it plays in our democratic system, we have to demonstrate more respect.

We now have a consensus—I see that I have less than a minute to go here—to have the Chief Electoral Officer here on Thursday. We're going to have him before us, and I hope and trust we'll see a demonstration of respect for the institution. There is nothing wrong with asking good, difficult questions. We should be challenging our Chief Electoral Officer, Mr. Mayrand, to be very frank with us in terms of what it is he believes he needs in order to be able to ensure that when someone violates an election law, he has the power and the authority to be able to deal with it, to ensure there's a consequence, and at the end of the day to do it in a timely fashion, because that is not happening today, and we need to ensure that is happening.

That is the reason why, Mr. Chair, I suggest to you that we should vote against this motion. The May 1 deadline is garbage. We should not support this deadline. This legislation is far too important. It needs to be fixed or we should just let it die on the order paper and get it straightened out at another time.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words, Mr. Chair.

• (2220)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lamoureux.

Back to you, Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Chair, as per our agreement, I'd like to call the motion now.

The Chair: I'll call the vote on Mr. Lukiwski's motion.

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: I would like a recorded vote, please.

The Chair: Sure. We can do a recorded vote. We have a lot less people in the room, so it's a lot easier.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 5; nays 4)

The Chair: The motion carries, so we now have a motion.

Before we adjourn this evening, on Thursday if at all possible, and it sure looks like it is, Monsieur Mayrand will be here for an hour and a half.

Mr. David Christopherson: Chair...?

Yes.

Mr. David Christopherson: If I may, I just wanted to clarify that the business section will remain in public on Thursday.

The Chair: Yes, well, of course it's always up to the will of the committee when we—

Mr. David Christopherson: I'm seeking the will of the committee now to get a sense of where we'll be.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I mean, unless there's something.... If we're talking about future committee business for these hearings, such as witness lists, scheduling of meetings, and things like that, I have no difficulty with that.

But while I have the floor, there's one suggestion I could have for the opposition members, and that's to try to submit your witnesses to the clerk as quickly as possible.

The Chair: I was going to get to that.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: That way, when we engage in this conversation, we're actually trying to deal with a finite number—

A voice: Are you the chair?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: —or at least we'll have a good sense of what we're looking at.

Mr. David Christopherson: Sorry, you're looking for that much detail by Thursday, or just...?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: No, no, I'm just saying get the witness lists in as quickly as you can, because it will be a fluid kind of situation, I'm sure.

The Chair: We're really getting automated here. We're going to go paperless as a committee, and somehow we can now go chairless.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: Only for a while, Chair, only for a while.

The Chair: It just kind of happens around here.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: [*Inaudible—Editor*]...pointed out to me, Chair, you cut me off.

Voices: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Oh, yes—that too.

We will use the other part of Thursday's meeting for planning, or at least the start of the planning with witnesses. I'll echo what Mr. Lukiwski said, that the quicker we can start to get more witness lists in....

Nothing will ever be final. Until the last day we're done our study there's a chance to do it, but witness lists are easy for us to do some scheduling with to try to make the whole thing work.

I'd like to thank you all for your long day.

Mr. Christopherson, good job—and I hope I never have to listen to that much of you again.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: I would share that with you. Notwithstanding a couple of little moments, Chair, I want to thank you again for respecting the rights of members. It's a tough spot to be in.

•(2225)

The Chair: I'm sorry, but you're being repetitious.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Mr. David Christopherson: I thought you liked that repetition. You told me that was okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

We are adjourned.

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