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Chair

Mr. Joe Preston

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• (1100)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC)): We'll call ourselves to order, please.

This is the procedure and house affairs committee, here studying the Fair Elections Act.

We're in public, and televised today.

Mr. Harry Neufeld will be here with us for our first hour.

Mr. Neufeld, if you have an opening statement, please go ahead with it and at the end of that we'll go into rounds of questions, and the members of Parliament will be able to ask you all the most intelligent questions they can think of.

Mr. Harry Neufeld (Electoral Management Consultant, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to you and this committee for inviting me here.

I will make some short introductory remarks, after which I will be pleased to answer the questions you have with regard to Bill C-23, the Fair Elections Act.

Last week, I worked at an orientation conference for senior election officials in one of our provinces. It was attended by a great many newly appointed returning officers and election clerks who had never managed elections before.

I found the trainers were particularly effective in offering a window on democratic first principles that are supported in law around the globe. The universal and equal suffrage guarantees that Canada has supported, both in article 21 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 25 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, were rightly described as foundational to the conduct of free and fair elections.

Consistent with these principles, the trainers described their provincial election act as a legal vehicle providing all resident citizens over the age of 18 with opportunities to exercise their constitutional rights, guaranteed by section 3 of Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, where it says:

Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein.

The inclusive and unqualified scope of this charter clause, which I have read and heard quoted hundreds of times since it became law in 1982, caused me to reflect on how electoral franchise laws in Canada

have evolved and how Bill C-23 departs markedly from that evolution.

There is a healthy but constant tension in every voting system between the two equally important goals of providing broad accessibility, based on the fundamental franchise rights I just mentioned, and ensuring procedural integrity that maintains citizens' confidence in the process itself. Canada is no different in this regard.

By accessibility, I mean the ease and flexibility by which all eligible voters can obtain a ballot at election time. The considerable extensions to advance voting provisions are one clear example of this.

By integrity, I mean employing administrative mechanisms to ensure that only eligible electors vote, that they only vote once, that their vote is kept secret, that each ballot choice is counted accurately, and that, except for maintaining the first principle of ballot secrecy, the entire process is conducted in a fully transparent manner. The introduction of voter ID laws in 2007 are an example in this context.

In its current form, Bill C-23 creates a fundamental imbalance between accessibility and integrity. It introduces a requirement that every elector must provide acceptable documentation to prove both their identity and address of residence prior to being issued a ballot. The bill would eliminate the current ability of a registered voter, who has the prescribed identity documents, to vouch for one other elector who does not possess sufficient documentation to prove both their identity and address. Further, it bars the voter information card, which Elections Canada mails to each registered voter to advise them where and when to vote, from being used as documentary proof of residential address.

The Minister of State for Democratic Reform has stated that vouching must be eliminated to crack down on voter fraud. He has also stated that voter information cards must be eliminated as identification for confirming a voter's address because these cards are a replacement for acceptable ID.

The minister has used the "2013 Compliance Review Report", which I authored, that drew attention to administrative errors made by election officers during the 2011 general election, as the basis for justifying the elimination of vouching. He characterizes vouching irregularities in the context of undetected voter fraud.

I was engaged to audit aspects of the 2011 general election as a third-party election expert, and it is important to me that my report is properly understood. Having listened carefully to what the minister has said, it is my opinion that he has not interpreted my report correctly.

Yes, my report articulates that there were serious problems with vouching during the election, as well as even greater numbers of irregularities in administering voter registration in conjunction with voting. But voters were not the problem. The problem was with the system. My observation was that election officers, ordinary citizens willing to work a very long day without breaks for minimum wage or less, had trouble completing a series of exceedingly complex procedures on their first and only day on the job.

● (1105)

My assessment focused on the fact that election officers are responsible for administering 17 different exception procedures, of which vouching is just one, and that they often completed these procedures imperfectly.

My report concludes that this is a systemic problem related to our antiquated voting model. At no point in the report do I link vouching with fraudulent voting. I've heard the minister articulate that the absence of evidence of voter fraud doesn't mean it hasn't been happening. I heard him further suggest that Elections Canada simply isn't aware of the level of voter fraud with vouching because the agency hasn't investigated the many instances where legally required vouching procedures were not followed. However, over the course of my study I heard of no candidate scrutineers, voters, or media representatives ever raising an issue with respect to vouching fraud. I am not aware of any formal complaints in this regard.

Around the globe, I know of no election administrators who would launch an investigation into voter fraud without solid evidence or any credible allegations or complaints. During the Etobicoke Centre court case, both the Ontario Superior Court and the Supreme Court of Canada were very clear that there was no evidence that persons who were ineligible to vote were allowed to vote due to procedural errors made by election officers. My compliance review report clearly states this in several places. So do the written court judgments themselves.

In addition, the Supreme Court judgment established a new precedent for deciding whether or not to accept votes when procedural irregularities are alleged. This involves a two-step test. First, the occurrence of election process irregularities must be proven. Second, evidence must be presented that satisfies the court that those procedural irregularities actually resulted in ineligible persons being permitted to vote.

Bill C-23 would eliminate vouching on the basis that the minister thinks my report proves the process is so fraught with irregularities that it could lead to courts overturning election results. Irregularities identified have been equated with voter fraud by the minister, as he implies that both legal tests have been met and that elections will be overturned if vouching continues. In the name of improved procedural integrity, the bill would see fit to disenfranchise more than 100,000 eligible voters. Most of these eligible voters have no difficulty in providing ID that proves who they are, but they are challenged to produce documentation that proves their current residential address. Expanded use of the voter information card could remedy this, but Bill C-23, as currently drafted, would disallow any such use.

Here's the thing. A large number of irregularities did occur, but there's no evidence whatsoever that any voters fraudulently

misrepresented themselves in the vouching process. There is only evidence that the current voting process model needs an urgent administrative redesign and significant modernization. Our current model has served us well since Confederation, but it must be re-engineered to function in a way that measures up appropriately to 21st century expectations of what universal and equal suffrage should mean. It needs to be redesigned in a way that permits temporary election officers to easily perform their role in a fully compliant manner.

For the past 33 years, I have worked on planning, organizing, and conducting elections in Canada and around the world. I've performed this work in places as diverse as South Africa, Guyana, Libya, and Russia. My interest has always been to ensure that the fundamental rights people have to participate in free and fair electoral processes are upheld. My principal goal today has been to offer clarification with respect to what I wrote in my report on compliance during the 2011 general election. In that light, I believe it is clear that parts of Bill C-23 require careful reconsideration.

Thank you, Mr. Chair. I turn things back to you.

● (1110)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neufeld. Thank you for your opening statement.

We'll go to a seven-minute round starting with Mr. O'Toole.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Durham, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, and thank you very much, Mr. Neufeld, for appearing this morning.

I have read both your final report and your interim report as well as the compendiums attached, and it's clear that you did a lot of work on them. I appreciate that, because I think we've identified that there are some irregularities and challenges, and it's a better way forward.

You were chief electoral officer in British Columbia for 10 years, and you are one of our experts as a result of that work. In the last provincial election in British Columbia, which elected Premier Clark—and we remember the polls were wrong—on election day for registration at the polls, how many people vouched?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: As you know, I was not the chief electoral officer for the 2013 election in British Columbia, but what I understand from Keith Archer's testimony at this committee two days ago is that approximately 1% of British Columbians vouched in that election.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: The *Compendium of Election Administration in Canada: A Comparative Overview*, which you cite and reference in your interim report, actually goes through the number of provinces and territories that permit vouching on election day. Do you know how many provinces and territories permit vouching?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I looked at that document just recently and I'm not sure it's entirely up to date and accurate with regard to vouching.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: This is the Elections Canada's document that you cited in your report.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Right.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: It's incorrect?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I know for a fact that in Saskatchewan, provincially, they do allow vouching, and I'm quite sure that in that document it says they don't.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: No—

Mr. Harry Neufeld: It may be as a result of amendments since that document was put together.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Your recollection is correct, Mr. Neufeld, Saskatchewan is one of four provinces and territories that permit election day registration vouching: New Brunswick, the Yukon, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. So the vast majority of the Canadian population at a provincial level, and here in Ontario at a municipal level do not vouch.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Vouching is not the only option for dealing with the situation where you have a requirement—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: But on election day, at registration, because I think that's what we're talking about here.... Is it reasonable to make the changes with respect to vouching that we're proposing when most provinces don't engage in that election day vouching process?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Election day registration process or election day vouching?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Well, it's when you vouch, as part of your registration, if you're not on the official list of electors, or whatever the provincial equivalent is. To have someone vouch to meet the criteria of eligibility is not done in the majority of provincial elections in Canada and the majority of municipal elections. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I haven't looked at the legislation for all jurisdictions, but I wouldn't be surprised if you are correct.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Okay.

So in many ways federally we're coming into line with what is happening provincially.

I'm glad you broke down the distinction between fraud.... There has been a lot of talk about fraud—and fraud being proven or not proven—and irregularities. The Supreme Court decision in Etobicoke Centre, which led to your report and a lot of time you spent on that, said the following about irregularities versus fraud. I will quote at paragraph 43 of the decision:

The common thread between the words "irregularities, fraud or corrupt or illegal practices" is the seriousness of the conduct and its impact on the integrity of the electoral process.

So they use the associated words to show that the Supreme Court considers an irregularity just as serious as fraud if the second step you identify impacts the result. So is it fair to say we've spent too much time trying to say, are the irregularities fraud-based or just errors, when the Supreme Court equates them as both being something that should be fixed?

●(1115)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: With respect, sir, I think you're citing the minority view of the Supreme Court. The majority view was that this double test had to be satisfied.

I don't disagree with you that the irregularities that were identified in my compliance review are serious problems that need to be addressed. I commend Elections Canada for publishing this report and making it public because in many ways it shines a light on a problem that I think a lot of election administrators didn't realize was there.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: You've hit a good point. This is actually what the majority examined, and so that was the majority finding. As well, they looked at the distinction between somebody not following the proper procedure, which is permitted by the act, to have procedure, and it meets the charter test to have appropriate procedures.... They say, at paragraph 65, that they think it's superior to actually have someone go away and come back compliant rather than allow a non-compliant vote to happen. At paragraph 65 they say:

However, unlike the rejection of a valid vote, turning away a voter on election day is not fatal to that person's right to vote. If at first that voter could not comply with a procedural requirement, with some additional effort, he or she can return to the polling station and obtain a ballot.

So the Supreme Court has the opinion that to protect the integrity of our system it's probably superior to maintain a rigid procedure, and it does not disenfranchise someone.

In our act, we are actually allowing an additional day of voting so if people show up and don't have the right documents they can go back. Does that not protect the fact that we're not disenfranchising?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: For the vast majority of Canadians, there's no issue. They have a driver's licence, and that's the single document they need in order to be given a ballot. There are approximately four million eligible voters in Canada who don't have a driver's licence, or an equivalent provincial ID or territorial ID card. That's where they fall into the second group, where they require two pieces of ID. For the vast majority of those, again, it's not a problem. But there are some people, and it's about 1%, who simply don't, in most cases, have the address identification.

If I take my driver's licence out of my wallet, I have no other identification with me that proves my address. I have a whole lot of cards and things that have my name on them. There's a very high mobility rate in Canada. About 13% of people move every year. Companies and organizations don't tend to put addresses on these identity cards, for obvious reasons; they go out of date too quickly.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neufeld.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: With regard to having that second piece of address ID and sending somebody home for it, in many cases they're not going to be able to come up with something. The utility bills are sent to them electronically. They're not sent to them on paper because utility companies, rightfully, are trying to minimize their cost and telling their clients that they have to pay if they want a paper bill. Electronic bills are not permitted to be printed and used as an ID.

The Chair: Excuse me, gentlemen. Thank you. We're well past the time on that one.

We're going to go to Mr. Scott for seven minutes.

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Neufeld, for coming.

I want to go through a couple of quick questions just to get us on the right track.

It's true, I think, from your testimony and your report, and I just want to confirm it, that you did not recommend eliminating vouching. You also recommended an expanded use of voter information cards.

• (1120)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: That's correct.

Mr. Craig Scott: In terms of the problem with the irregularities that you very carefully documented, am I right in thinking that you proposed a whole series of remedies?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I proposed a series of remedies, mostly administrative, for the 2015 election, and some legal changes, to enhance the ability of Elections Canada to hire people in an orderly way in order to compensate them in an appropriate way, and to make sure they are supervised appropriately.

Mr. Craig Scott: Great.

To your knowledge, at any point has the minister, in his public remarks, ever cited anything in your report to deal with these kinds of remedies that you are suggesting?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Craig Scott: Do you think it's fair to say that the minister has been very selectively quoting your report in order to create the impression that fraud is both a problem, and likely?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I think he has been selectively reading and quoting from my report.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you.

There is the following quotation from the minister, from February 6, where he said:

The Supreme Court has recognized that the irregularities are too high, as did the Neufeld report commissioned by Elections Canada. As a result, the fair elections act would protect the integrity of the vote by ending the practice of vouching as a form of identification.

Is this one of the examples of an invocation of your report to create the impression that getting rid of vouching follows from your report? Is this not something that you would consider as not an exactly fair way to link your report to his remedies?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I don't think it's a fair interpretation of what my report recommended or what it contained.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you.

Regarding your report, you set out a number of possible ways to improve recruitment and training, both in relation to administrative changes for 2015 and much more broadly, along the same lines that Elections Canada has already prepared to do with the New Brunswick model. I'd like to ask whether Mr. Mayrand has

responded to your report and whether he accepted the key recommendations about how to proceed.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Yes.

In the published version of the report, which I understood all of you have received, and in the online version on Elections Canada's website, the response of Marc Mayrand is contained right in the report. Specifically with the 12 recommendations I made, there is a detailed response. He didn't agree with all my recommendations, but with by far the majority of them, he did. There's also a response following the executive summary.

Mr. Mayrand has been on record endorsing the work and endorsing the majority of the recommendations that I made.

Mr. Craig Scott: Was the minister or any of his officials ever in touch with you to discuss your report and to go into detail about what the appropriate response might be to your findings about irregularities?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I was waiting for that call and it never came.

Mr. Craig Scott: I'm very surprised at that. It's quite consistent with the stellar job of consultation this minister has carried out from the beginning.

An hon. member: Have you read the report?

Mr. Craig Scott: What kind of question's that?

An hon. member: Ignore him.

Mr. Craig Scott: I've read it three times, so what do you think?

• (1125)

The Chair: Try to address the table please, gentlemen.

Mr. Craig Scott: Get rid of the substitute member and then we won't have this.

In terms of byelection compliance, the minister also likes to say things like the following, and this is in response to a question:

Mr. Speaker... If he thinks it can just be fixed, why does he not read in the Neufeld report where that was tried. It states:

And then he quotes you.

During two of these elections

—byelections—

quality assurance programs involving Onsite Conformity Advisors...were applied. However, vouching irregularities still averaged 21 percent during [these] monitored elections. This indicates that overly complex procedures cannot be remedied simply by improved quality assurance.

Is it the case that some of your administrative recommendations would not have been applied in those byelections?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: You need to have the context of the compliance advisers and their role. Nothing changed in process. Nothing changed in terms of the forms. Nothing changed in terms of the training. It was all as it was in 2011. What changed was that there was a lot more oversight. The oversight itself isn't what did it.

What needed to happen, and I was very clear in my report about this, is that the administrative process needed to take a look at what the legislation requires and be simplified and streamlined. All the forms and all the instructions need to be made consistent and in absolutely clear, plain language. The training needs to be considerably improved. It all needs to be tested and be made sure that it works; and that, in a combination, can really improve the compliance level.

Simply having a bunch of people wandering around taking notes on whether people are doing it correctly or not, and intervening with their supervisors if they're not, isn't enough. That's the statement I was trying to make. If you read the whole report you get that context. If you selectively take a footnote, you don't.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you.

The last thing is, am I correct in recalling in the report, which I've read many times, that you recommended getting rid of the role of political parties in the recruitment of election day workers, so as to enhance both the quality of the recruitment and training?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: There are a number of issues here. One of them is that fundamentally one of the principles, and this is endorsed all over the world, is that election administration should be administered neutrally. There's really no role for partisans handling ballots. There's certainly a role for partisans scrutinizing the handling of ballots, scrutinizing the registration process, and scrutinizing everything that goes on in the voting place. But it's not appropriate for partisans, who get appointed late in the game, to be....

What the Chief Electoral Officer has to depend on is his workforce. We have fixed election dates now, and one of the great advantages.... I was the chief electoral officer in British Columbia when the first—

The Chair: Mr. Neufeld, we're well past Mr. Scott's time. I tried to give you a chance to finish your thought, but the members of our committee love to ask a question with their time absolutely run out so that you get to take more time. We won't go through that route today.

Mr. Simms, you're up for seven minutes. If Mr. Neufeld would like to finish his thoughts through your questions, that would work fine.

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to quote something from *Opitz v. Wrzesnewskyj*, and it's from paragraph 45. I just want to get your comment on this, just to start. It says: "The goal of accessibility can only be achieved if we are prepared to accept some degree of uncertainty that all who voted were entitled to do so."

Citing all the irregularities that you found in 2011, do you think that's a fitting way to look at how what they've done here is far too egregious against the average voter who deserves accessibility?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Well, as I mentioned in my opening remarks, this is a fundamental right. The franchise is an absolutely fundamental right that's guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in treaties that Canada is a signatory to, and in the charter.

There's this balance between the integrity of the process and the accessibility of the ballot. There's a tension there, but what I find is that there's no improvement as a result of Bill C-23's elimination of vouching and the elimination of the voter information card as a form of address ID. There's nothing in it that improves integrity, but what it does is that it very seriously and negatively affects accessibility and, I would say, disenfranchises voters.

Mr. Scott Simms: We're talking about an incredibly large number of people who would be disenfranchised by throwing out the entire system of vouching.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: And possibly even a larger number if the voter information card is no longer allowed in any form as ID.

Mr. Scott Simms: Right, and at no point in the report do you link vouching with fraudulent voting.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Not at all.

Mr. Scott Simms: Okay.

Let me ask you this, because you point out the question of addresses, and many of the IDs cited by the minister, such as the most basic of ID, which is a problem I have in rural areas.... For example, there are the people who live in seniors homes. I know of one particular senior in my riding who lives in a home, and the only way that she was enfranchised or able to vote was because of her voter identification card.

The minister cites health cards. In our province, there is no address on that card. All of the ID he cites—well over 30, the very basic ID, with the exception, of course, of a driver's licence, which this woman does not have—disenfranchises her, and now, for the first time since Confederation in Newfoundland and Labrador, she cannot vote, period.

They talked about bracelets. I have yet to see a bracelet with an address.

Do you think this is an oversight that you're stunned by, this fact that they would say that all this ID can be used, when in fact the disenfranchised voters, such as first nations, students, and those in rural areas cannot vote because of the address? And now the one thing they had is eliminated.

• (1130)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Address ID is a real problem in this whole equation. I don't know of a single other piece of federal documentation that is widely accessible to eligible voters that could be used to prove address. We're moving more and more into an electronic society, where Canada Post is promoting epost and electronic delivery of mail.

Mr. Scott Simms: Exactly.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: There are all sorts of good reasons for that, but it presents a problem. People have ID, but they have problems with proving their address of residence.

In some cases, driver's licences have post office box numbers on them, and everybody knows that you don't live in a post office box. That's not adequate to prove what your residential address is. They're challenged that they have to have another piece of ID.... I've seen this, where they're very frustrated. If they're a regular voter and they weren't allowed in the last election to use their voter information card as address ID, they're scrambling around, emptying their wallet, and trying to figure out how they're going to get a ballot. Their driver's licence, which they thought was going to be enough, isn't working because it has a post office box on it.

Mr. Scott Simms: Speaking of scrambling around, the minister keeps distorting a lot of these facts within Bill C-23, and they're quoting you, or partially quoting you, like, for example, what we're witnessing here today. I don't know what province.... I believe there were four provinces that were cited earlier, but I do know...and I've seen this, where vouching does take place in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Nevertheless—I'd love to be proven wrong—I do think that what you have here in the report is something that I think is so egregious by eliminating the entire system of vouching.... Internationally, vouching is also held up in jurisdictions like those in Europe.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: It's used in jurisdictions all over the world where there's a requirement to show ID in order to obtain a ballot, because it's sort of the final safety net for people who cannot provide the combination of identity that's requested in law. It's not the only option. There are other options that are available. But it's the one that's been selected in many countries.

Mr. Scott Simms: Has the government ever approached you about some of these options—for example, to improve the system of vouching as opposed to eliminating it?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: No, never.

The Chair: You still have 50 seconds.

Mr. Scott Simms: Again, I go back to what was said here from *Opitz v. Wrzesnewskyj*: “The goal of accessibility can only be achieved if we are prepared to accept some degree of uncertainty that all who voted were entitled to do so.”

Here you have a situation where they have disenfranchised an incredible number of people across this country, but this information was available to them beforehand, as stated by your report. And you never were consulted.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: No. I was at one point asked for a confirmation of all my contact particulars, but nothing ever came as a follow-up call or email or letter or anything.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms.

Mr. O'Toole, you have a four-minute round.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to build upon what my colleague Mr. Simms was going through. Really I think, in fairness, I'll make sure you get a copy, because I think a lot of Canadians don't realize that vouching really is not used. In fact, your report mentions that many jurisdictions don't use it.

Your report also mentions that built-in resistance to change is strong, within even the elections community. I think this act shows

that change and evolution and improvements will lead to mixed views, if I can put it mildly.

One key quote I have is from page 27 of your report on vouching and whether we can fix it. Your conclusion was: “...reducing the current rate of serious errors during...vouching transactions forms an immense challenge that should not be underestimated.” So fixing it appears difficult, immense, impossible. The Supreme Court decision has shown that procedure, even asking people to follow procedure, is not disenfranchising them, and in fact it's maintaining the integrity of the process.

I'm going to ask you about what's on Elections Canada's website, which is basically voter identification at the polls. It's annex C of your interim report, which is the identification. You talk about 85% or more of Canadians having the quick one-to-three-minute time at the polling station. Those are people who are generally on the official list of electors, and they would come in with identification and go through. The 15% you talk about, the 17 exceptions that are required, some of those are physical assistance, disability, a whole range of those 17. But the ones that seem prone to error are either registration issues, which you're addressing through training and other improvements, or vouching. The audit showed that more than 120,000 vouching transactions produced 95,559 errors. Your report said there was a 42% error rate as a minimum, but it could go as high as 80%, but you couldn't conclude an exact figure because in some errors there were multiple errors. So what I'm quoting here—95,559—are errors but one transaction could have had two errors. Is that correct?

• (1135)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: You have serious errors and you have incidental errors. Some of the errors are not of huge consequence. An example is that it's election day and somebody doesn't record the date in a voter registration form that they're taking. It's a given that it's on election day, but it is an error in that the instructions say you have to fill in the date that the registration was taken.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: So is it fair to say that between serious errors—the 42% rate your report identified—and less consequential ones—80%, well in that range—over half the vouching transactions have errors, rather serious or less serious?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: There's a huge number of errors with vouching; no doubt about it.

Vouching is not the only alternative here. If you're willing, I'd be happy to describe some of the other—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Unfortunately, with my time, I'm unwilling.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I appreciate that, because—

The Chair: Mr. O'Toole, you're right; you're out of time. Thank you. We go to Madame Latendresse.

You have four minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Neufeld, thank you for being here with us today and for giving us clarifications on your report. This report is very conclusive regarding everything that has been done on this topic up till now.

First, I would like to say that I find it deplorable that we are still talking about irregularities that are associated with fraud. According to what you explained, I think it is very clear that that link is not there, and that that is not a reason to completely eliminate identification using the voter information card as well as the use of vouchers. I find this really deplorable.

I'd like to go back briefly to what Mr. Scott asked you earlier. Can you talk to us about your recommendation to change the way in which election workers are hired? I would like you to give us some more details on that because the Chief Electoral Officer also made that recommendation. That would be a very practical solution that would allow people to eliminate errors that are currently linked to the use of vouchers and the use of the voter information card.

Do you think that broadening the pool of candidates for these election official positions, and hiring these people earlier and training them better, would be an acceptable way of improving the voucher system?

• (1140)

[English]

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I was Chief Electoral Officer in British Columbia for the 2005 general election, which was the first fixed-date election at a provincial level in Canada. October 19, 2015, will probably be the first fixed-date general election at the federal level.

One of the advantages of fixed dates, from an election administrator's viewpoint, is that everything becomes like a big project, and you can work backwards. Ideally, you're recruiting your election officers far before the writ is issued. You're not waiting until two weeks before; you're not scrambling at the last minute trying to get training sessions done the night before they go to work. You're trying to do this in a really orderly way. You try to get the best people you can, and you want to make sure that you fit training into their schedules and your schedule. You want to make sure that you have training sessions of like-roled officials at the same time.

So absolutely, having more time to do the training—and the recruitment before the training—really professionally is an advantage, I think, for improving compliance.

[Translation]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: You also recommended that more young people, that is to say people between the ages of 16 and 18, be hired for election worker positions. That is a recommendation we tried to promote a great deal, saying that this would allow these young people to acquire some very concrete experience regarding electoral work.

Do you think this could also be a good way of getting them more involved in the process and of giving them more of a desire to vote?

[English]

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I fully agree that having 16- and 17-year-olds included in being election officials is a positive thing.

When I was in British Columbia, we made it a policy to try to pair up these underage election officers with well-seasoned, older election officers. You would sometimes have an older lady with a blue rinse and a younger person with blue hair, and they would learn lots from each other and were frequently excellent teams.

The young people learn really quickly. Election procedures tend to be fairly complex, and they're really good at doing the complex paperwork and the analysis that's associated with applying it.

The Chair: Thank you.

It appears as though we'll have time for one more round here. A three-minute round, I think, could serve us.

Mr. O'Toole.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Is there any chance that I could get in on any rounds before Mr. Neufeld leaves?

The Chair: Ms. May, you are not assigned to be a member of this committee, and I would need unanimous consent for that to happen.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I was hoping you would check for unanimous consent.

The Chair: I don't appear to have it.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Do you have a secret code? I didn't hear anything.

The Chair: I saw a couple of heads shake, so I'm just looking at

Mr. Scott Simms: Whose head was that?

I have a point of order.

The Chair: Mr. Simms.

Mr. Scott Simms: I'm quoting from Elections Newfoundland and Labrador: It is also possible for a Deputy Returning Officer or Poll Clerk who is working at the polling station to visibly identify an elector (if he or she knows the individual and can vouch that he or she is who they claim to be).

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simms. You got that on the record. It is not really a point of order.

Mr. O'Toole, take three minutes, please.

It may be two minutes now, folks, but let's—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll table the actual compendium that—

The Chair: I'm sorry. We still have a four-minute round. We'll be getting to the shorter round after. I apologize.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll table afterwards the compendium Mr. Neufeld himself refers to that does a comparative overview of polling day registration, which says clearly that Newfoundland and Labrador electors must produce proper identification and take an oath.

To review where we are, four of the thirteen jurisdictions on a provincial level and most municipal levels do not permit vouching. I reference the decision of the majority of the Supreme Court, which clearly said that legislation provides that irregularities should be held in the same way as fraud if, as per your second point, they can impact the results.

We are spending a lot of time asking whether there is nefarious conduct going on when we really should be saying that there's a 42% to 80% error rate with vouching, which most jurisdictions don't use and which you yourself, Mr. Neufeld, said will form an immense challenge to fix.

● (1145)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Let me talk about two alternatives. One is what's called a tendered ballot. This is a case in which somebody in a special situation, such as a vouching situation, casts a ballot, but their ballot is put into an envelope....

It's actually put into two envelopes. The first envelope is a secrecy envelope, and then the envelope that surrounds it is an envelope that has all the details about the individual and what the conditions were under which they cast their vote. This allows opportunity after the election day is over for the returning officer, with the scrutineers from the parties and the candidates, to look at these—

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Can you quickly go on to the second one?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: The second one is the approach used in Manitoba. If you want to read an election act that's written in plain language, I think Manitoba's is the best example in the country.

Section 2 of the Manitoba Elections Act deals with establishing identity:

A person who is required to establish his or her identity under this Act

—section 129 says that every voter has to establish their identity

—may do so by providing (a) an official document issued by a federal, provincial, or municipal government that contains the person's name and photograph;

—rather like our first step in the document you have there from Elections Canada—

or (b) at least two documents that provide evidence of the person's identity satisfactory to the election official in question.

That's like the second part of the Elections Canada arrangement. But here is the difference.

Instead of vouching, it says:

If none of the documents provided contains a current address, the person must make a signed declaration as to his or her current address.

So there's no vouching; there is a signed declaration. There's a paper trail, there's integrity to the process, and you're not disenfranchising.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: The tendered balloting that you suggest, with multiple envelopes and the like, certainly suggests even more administrative challenges, for a fairly small amount of training for our officials—which a large part of your report looked at—as well as administering of oaths. There are seven oaths that are currently administered, which is also a burden.

But going back to these options 1, 2, and 3, with option 3 being vouching, if we take away the vouching of option 3, as we have established many other jurisdictions do, what are we left with?

I'm an average guy. If I showed up to vote, I would have my driver's licence, which as you said more than 85% of people tend to have. And if we just go through the wallet, the health card... acceptable, acceptable, acceptable—

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Which one has your address?

The Chair: We'll give Mr. O'Toole a chance to put his wallet back together, and I think we're now limited to about a two-minute round.

Mr. O'Toole, your time is well completed. Thank you.

Mr. Hawn, you have two minutes.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Neufeld, this will be a little more general.

People see the taxes, EI claims, insurance claims... Does it not make sense that there will always be people who will try to game a system such as elections no matter what, just based on human nature? You've all seen it.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: There are several kinds of fraud. I've worked around parts of the world where election fraud is a real problem. I've seen vote buying; I've seen ghost voting, double counting, electoral manipulation such as the misuse of absentee ballots, misinformation to voters, intimidation, invalidation or destruction of ballots—

Hon. Laurie Hawn: I'm not asking for your experience; I'm asking for your judgment on human nature.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: —mis-recording of voting results. Those are all election fraud.

Voting fraud, where voters actually show up and impersonate someone else or vote more than once, in my experience, is very rare.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Because voter information cards were not allowed as a singular form of ID in 2006—and I'm representing 2006 and I'll have more to say about that when I'm in your seat next week—and multiple vouching was not allowed in 2006—

● (1150)

Mr. Harry Neufeld: You didn't require ID in 2006.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: You could go in, in fact, with a voter ID card. It wasn't allowed; that doesn't mean it didn't happen. Because something is not allowed, does that automatically mean it's not attempted and couldn't be successful?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: No, let's distinguish what we're talking about here.

Before 2007, if you were on the voters list, and you showed up at your polling station and announced who you were, you were given a ballot.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Correct. So the comments that I made that, not that colleague, but his partner across the floor tried to impugn just now in the House of Commons saying that what I said was clearly not true, voter information cards were allowed and used in 2006.

Mr. Harry Neufeld: Voter information cards were a piece of information to tell voters when they could vote and where they could vote.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: And they were used as ID. That changed in 2007, partly because of the complaint that we filed officially with the Commissioner of Elections and things changed after that, which was a good thing.

The Chair: Mr. Hawn, thank you. I know we'll get back to that.

Mr. Christopherson, two minutes, please.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Neufeld, for being here today. You're the third of the trilogy of giants that Canadians have needed to hear from on this—Mr. Mayrand and Mr. Kingsley were before you. Like yourself, my words, they've all but shredded the idea that eliminating vouching strengthens our election process any way.

I want to just return to some of your comments and then ask a question at the end of it and I'm very mindful of my time. This is you,

Having listened carefully to what the minister has said, it is my opinion that he has not interpreted my report correctly. But voters were not the problem. The problem was with the system. My report concludes that this is a systemic problem related to our antiquated voting model. At no point in the report do I link vouching with fraudulent voting.

I've heard the minister articulate that the absence of evidence of voter fraud doesn't mean it hasn't been happening. I heard him further suggest Elections Canada simply isn't aware of the level of voter fraud...because the agency hasn't investigated....

However, over the course of my study I heard of no candidate scrutineers, voters, or media representatives ever raising an issue with respect to vouching fraud. I am not aware of any formal complaints in this regard.

A large number of irregularities did occur, but there's no evidence whatsoever that any voters fraudulently misrepresented themselves in the vouching process.

It looks to me like your words have just left a smouldering mass of discredit and rhetoric in terms of the minister's words. Is there anything about eliminating vouching that would strengthen our electoral system or is it clear that if we eliminate it, we weaken our system?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: I don't think that eliminating vouching will improve the integrity of elections in Canada at all and I am fearful that it will considerably reduce accessibility to the ballot for people who are guaranteed the right to vote.

The Chair: Thank you Mr. Neufeld.

Thank you Mr. Christopherson. Good timing on that, by the way.

Mr. Reid for two minutes to finish this off.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Thank you for being here, Mr. Neufeld.

You referred to something you called tendered voting, which sounds a lot like a version of what we do if we cast a postal ballot.

You put a ballot inside an anonymity envelope which goes inside an envelope and has some kind of signature, I gather, and other information on it.

I have two questions for you; you can answer both of them and fill up the remaining time.

Number one, I assume this is used in several jurisdictions. I wonder if you could just mention what some of those are.

Number two, if that system were in place, but vouching were removed, would it resolve the issues you've raised with regard to vouching and the ability of every Canadian to cast a ballot?

Mr. Harry Neufeld: It could be engineered in a way that allowed that.

Vouching is undoubtedly a complex process. It is resisted in many jurisdictions because it delays your official voting result. It has been a feature in British Columbia for many decades. It is the way in which the provinces enacted the ability for any registered voter or any eligible voter in British Columbia to vote at any voting location, and this is right from the days the writs are issued until election day. If voters for some reason cannot get to their assigned voting place, they can vote at any other voting place in the province, but because they're not on the list for whatever place they're attending at, their ballots go into what's called a tendered ballot envelope, and those all get shipped back and forth across the province in the 10 days that follow the election, and then on that 10th day they're all reviewed and scrutinized and counted. If a person has voted before, that person's vote is not allowed. If a person is not registered and claims to be, that vote is not allowed.

It allows that scrutiny, which may be something that could be engineered for the vouching process.

● (1155)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Neufeld.

We have run out of time for this hour of our study today, so I will suspend for just a minute.

Mr. Neufeld, we thank you for your testimony today.

● (1155)

_____ (Pause) _____

● (1155)

The Chair: Friends and colleagues, we have a busy hour. Let's get started, please.

We have four different witnesses in this hour. It's always a bit fun when we try to do that, so let's do our best to get down to work, please.

We have Alison Loat, the executive director of Samara; from the Institute for Research on Public Policy, Graham Fox; Nathalie Des Rosiers, a member of the board from the Faculty of Law, civil law, at the University of Ottawa; and Taylor Gunn from Civix.

I'll start from my right and work left. If you have an opening statement, please try to make it as short as you can. I'll likely flag you down somewhere near the five-minute mark if you haven't stopped by then.

Ms. Loat, would you like to go first, please?

• (1200)

Ms. Alison Loat (Executive Director and Co-Founder, Samara): Certainly. Thank you.

My name is Alison Loat. As the chair said, I am the co-founder and executive director of Samara, which is an independent non-partisan charity that works to improve political participation through research and education.

Today I'd like to suggest changes to Bill C-23 that our research suggests would help realize the ambition Monsieur Poilievre set out in the bill's introduction, to "ensure everyday citizens are in charge of democracy".

Our concern at Samara is with the declining participation of Canadians, both at elections and in between elections. In 2011, as this committee I'm sure well knows, only 38.8% of young people voted. Should these trends continue, this will further drive down turnout in Canada, already one of the lowest among western democracies. It's fair to assume that if only 38.8% graduated from high school, we might consider this a national emergency. We should be similarly concerned with our dismal turnout.

Apart from voting, Samara's research indicates that Canadians' political activity between elections, which includes such things as joining or donating to political parties or campaigns, is at or below 10%, and much lower for youth. This low participation is the largest problem facing Canadian democracy. Addressing it should be a paramount concern of every parliamentarian and a stronger focus of the bill.

Samara's focus group research confirms that people don't vote for two main reasons: access and motivation. Access includes things like not knowing where to vote or not having a registration card. Motivation includes things like believing that one's vote doesn't make a difference or that politics doesn't matter.

First, and in general terms, we recommend several changes to increase access. These are detailed in our submission, and include support for provisions to oversee telephone calls to voters and suggestions for improving efficiencies at polling stations.

Second, we have three specific suggestions to address the deeper problem of motivation and that seek to further citizens' participation through both multi-partisan and non-partisan means.

First, enhance the role of the Chief Electoral Officer to provide and support non-partisan public education on Canadian democracy. Elections Canada should be encouraged to do a much better job here. Given the severity of the turnout problem in Canada, a well-funded independent organization focused on engagement should be strengthened rather than eliminated, particularly given its support of programs—like Student Vote—that have proven results.

Second, we recommend that working with and through non-partisan civil society organizations, Elections Canada administer an

innovative funding and research program based on current understanding of what is actually effective in increasing participation, and then measure and report on those results. This would be a valuable resource for political parties, teachers, academics, community groups, and others who seek to address Canada's declining political participation.

Third, in order to ensure that political parties fulfill the spirit of Mr. Poilievre's appeal in the House that parties "reach Canadians where they are in their communities", we propose that parties allocate a portion of the increased funds, proposed in this bill, toward voter education and engagement in between elections. Mr. Poilievre is correct in highlighting that parties and candidates play a critical role in encouraging participation, and no doubt that is part of why they are so generously supported with tax dollars.

However, declining voter turnout, together with Samara's research, suggests there is room for parties to improve. In a recent survey, we asked Canadians to clarify what they expect from political parties and grade their performance. Over half of Canadians agreed that parties' most important job is "reaching out so Canadians' views can be represented", but they gave parties a failing mark of 43% in that role.

Dedicated expenditures could be used to facilitate visits of candidates and party members to classrooms, or provide funding to organizations performing engagement work. That's to cite just two examples. This investment in citizen engagement could help improve Canadians' perceptions of parties and bolster their involvement in them.

These three recommendations, coupled with further enhancements to voter access, will substantially improve Bill C-23 and Canada's ability to tackle the most pressing problem facing our democracy—Canadians' increasing disengagement from our very own political process.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I look forward to answering any questions.

• (1205)

The Chair: Super. We will get to that very shortly.

Madame Des Rosiers, you are next. You have five minutes or less, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers (Member of the Board, Dean, Faculty of Law, Civil Law, University of Ottawa, Fair Vote Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I will be speaking French and English.

My name is Nathalie Des Rosiers and I am here as a member of the Board of Fair Vote Canada, Représentation équitable au Canada. I am also currently with the Law Faculty, Common Law Section, and not the Civil Law Section, at the University of Ottawa.

Fair Vote Canada is a civil society group that aims to improve Canadian democracy, particularly through improvements to the Canadian electoral system.

[English]

Fair Vote is a grassroots organization and multi-partisan platform for electoral reform, and has been so since its beginning. My involvement with Fair Vote Canada came from a report that the Law Commission of Canada did, *Un vote qui compte*, which recommended some addition of an element of proportionality to avoid some of the problems of our current first-past-the-post system.

[Translation]

These proposals to reform our electoral system are on the table and must seriously be considered. I will be presenting certain concerns that Fair Vote Canada has with regards to the bill, as well as what it would like to see in a bill that would aim to improve Canadian democracy.

In the course of its work on improving democracy, Fair Vote Canada examined two aspects that are raised by the bill. First of all, the powers and autonomy of Elections Canada, as well as the system to control election expenses.

[English]

We have a more general concern with the integrity of the electoral system. The second part I'm going to talk about is as we said,

[Translation]

the effects of restrictions on voting, that is to say shrinking the pool of electors. That concerns us also.

[English]

Fair Vote Canada has always been concerned that the first-past-the-post system, the winner-takes-all aspect, undermines voter confidence and voter participation. It does undermine the motivation because your vote doesn't count the same. In a sense, I think we are concerned that some of the depositions in this bill may further erode voter confidence.

Certainly I think we support the recommendations for the increased power of Elections Canada to engage voters and do public education. We should encourage Elections Canada to have the power to communicate with the public widely. In that context I think the restrictions that Bill C-23 put on the power of Elections Canada to engage in public discussions and do research seem unwarranted at this time.

I think it is very important as well that we ensure the integrity of the system in a way in which appearances may make the difference here. Elections officers should be appointed by Elections Canada so they can be trained early and the appearance of neutrality be maintained. Central poll supervisors particularly are very important to maintain appearances here.

In our view the fundraising exceptions could lead to some difficulty in enforcement and to further scandals that undermine voter confidence at this point. I think it's well known that given that trends in voter participation are quite low, it seems to us to be the wrong time to do this.

[Translation]

Let's talk about the effects of restricting voting, that is to say shrinking the pool of electors. The purpose of any electoral reform should be to facilitate and encourage the exercise of one's right to vote. This is the very essence of our democracy, not only for the legitimacy of decisions taken by our Parliament, but also for the sense of civic belonging.

[English]

People who are encouraged to vote feel they belong. I am just going to end on this.

[Translation]

A lot of studies have established that political disengagement often leads to economic and social disengagement. It is very important that we not place obstacles or limit the exercise of people's right to vote in any way whatsoever.

[English]

In conclusion, in addition to the bill I think we should continue to pay attention to the possibility and encouragement of electoral reform. The mandate should continue to include doing research on why people vote or not, and what could improve voter participation in Canada.

Merci beaucoup.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Fox, you have five minutes or less, please.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Mr. Graham Fox (President and Chief Executive Officer, Institute for Research on Public Policy): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I also thank the members of the committee for giving me this opportunity to comment on Bill C-23.

[English]

The Institute for Research on Public Policy is a national independent, non-partisan think tank headquartered in Montreal. Our mission is to conduct research on issues of importance to Canadians and their governments, and bring academics and senior decision-makers together for discussion and debate based on that research.

As some of you will know, the IRPP has had a long-standing research interest in strengthening Canadian democracy and its institutions. Our most recent initiative, directly related to today's hearing, consisted of a consultation process with Canadian and international experts that led to our March 2013 report entitled *Issues Arising from Improper Communications with Electors*.

The report was distributed to committee members, so I'll dispense with a description of the process and focus my remarks on the recommendations coming out of our work as they relate to Bill C-23.

First, let me note that there are portions of Bill C-23 that are supported by our work and echo our own recommendations regarding improper communications with electors. The provisions related to increasing penalties for existing offences, and creating new offences, received strong support from our experts. The report also calls for requiring parties to document their use of voter contact services and preserve those records. Creating a voter contact registry, as is proposed, would be a positive step forward in regulating communications with voters.

However, other provisions proposed in Bill C-23 stand in sharp contrast to the conclusions drawn by our experts. For instance, our group felt strongly that the public education role of Elections Canada needed to be enhanced and considered a crucial element of its mandate. To see it curtailed in the way that is proposed seems to be a step in the wrong direction. Enumeration used to play a vital role in informing citizens about elections, but with enumeration gone, the public awareness campaign takes on renewed importance and should be preserved.

Some have raised some good and important questions about the success of past efforts in increasing voter turnouts. I think that's an important point and should be studied further, but if the ad campaign is ineffective, I'd suggest that means get a new ad agency, not stop advertising.

I raise a similar concern regarding the elimination of vouching. To be clear, our experts did not examine the issue directly. It was beyond the scope of our initiative. That said, we did stress that a primary goal of the system should be to make voting as easy as possible for as many citizens as possible.

Be vigilant about fraud, absolutely, but when in doubt, err on the side of the voter. The elimination of vouching seems to run counter to that principle and may further marginalize groups who are already marginalized by the elimination of enumeration and its replacement by the permanent voters list. I would add quickly that I think the discussion you were having in your last session about alternatives to vouching was an important step forward. My point is simply that we don't know enough about the consequences of eliminating it outright to simply proceed without due consideration.

With regard to what's not in the bill, our group also noted that even with legitimate communications with electors there are significant policy gaps that need to be addressed regarding personal information held by party databases. As parties become more sophisticated at collecting information about voters, we need a privacy protection regime to regulate how that information is stored, used, and protected. Voters would be surprised to learn how much parties know about them, and probably shocked to know that the information is not protected. If there is still scope to add to the bill, I would urge the committee to consider seriously a regulatory regime to frame how parties manage and protect our personal information.

Finally, our experts felt strongly that when making any changes to the Elections Act, Parliament should do its utmost to seek as broad a consensus as possible before it proceeds. Given how fundamental the act is to the conduct of our politics, we should avoid making changes on division, and aim for all-party support to the extent that is possible.

In light of what I think is a strong consensus on some issues covered in Bill C-23 and the great divisions that remain on others, I would suggest that the committee consider splitting the bill in two. Move quickly to enact the provisions that address improper communications with electors and perhaps other sections of the bill, and hold back on the public education role of Elections Canada, vouching, and perhaps other issues that would benefit from further debate and reflection.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. That's perfect timing.

Mr. Gunn, you're up. It's good to see you again, by the way.

Mr. Taylor Gunn (President, Civix): Thanks. That's the fastest 15 minutes that's ever gone by.

My name is Taylor Gunn, and I'm the founding president of Civix. I have spent the last 12 years working with students, teachers, schools, governments, and election agencies to encourage youth democratic participation.

My organization, Civix, primarily provides experiential civic education programming for elementary and secondary school students. Our rationale is that the best way for a young person to learn about their democracy is to experience it rather than to read about it in a textbook.

Our farthest-reaching and longest-running program is called Student Vote. It's a parallel election for students under the voting age. Many of you have participated in it. Basically, it helps schools put democracy on the curriculum throughout the course of an election campaign. Kids go home and they engage their parents in the election. They meet the official election candidates. They run the vote in the school for their peers, and they vote on the official election candidates.

In the last federal election, for the second time, we had over 500,000 students from just under 4,000 schools across the country. The cost of the program, in partnership with Elections Canada, was approximately \$750,000. That equates to about \$1.32 per student.

We now offer other programs between elections, because we know that being a citizen means more than just casting a ballot at election time.

You might have heard about the student budget consultation that we coordinated with Finance Minister Flaherty and the opposition party leaders, including Ms. May, thank you. It was all about getting kids to understand the federal budget.

We launched something this school year called Rep Day, which many of you have taken part in as well. Through that we're trying to help you get face time with your local high school students to break down their occasionally negative stereotypes of politicians and the political process.

I'm here with you today because I want to work with you on this act. We've enjoyed the privilege of working with Elections Canada over the past four federal elections through section 18.

This draft of the fair elections act would disempower Elections Canada from supporting us working in schools across the country. This is very important to me, because we think that in 2015 it will be possible to be in half of all schools in this country and to increase our numbers significantly. I don't feel that I can do that without the support of Elections Canada.

We have two short recommendations for you, but I first wanted to touch on something that's very important to us.

For us to be welcomed into schools, being in partnership with Elections Canada, along with the authenticity and credibility that creates, is critical. It is an irreplaceable badge of honour. Everyone knows that Elections Canada is our electoral agency and it can't be replaced with support from say, a Fraser Institute, or a Tides Canada foundation, or another group, for example. It's critical that we maintain that relationship.

The two recommendations we have are as follows. The first one may be obvious. We've enjoyed working under section 18. It's allowed us to come to them with new ideas. Obviously it's up to interpretation what they decide to support or get involved in, and maybe you'd like to narrow that. So our first recommendation would be to keep section 18 as it is and reserve the time of the committee to focus on some of the other major issues like vouching, etc.

Our second one—and you can look at the last page of the little booklet we gave you—deals with the new section 18, where the sidebar says “communication with electors”. What we do is teach the when, where, and how of voting. It's not even really in the bill; it's just describing what the new section is. If that could be changed to “communication with Canadians” I think that would allow us to have permission to teach the when, where, and how of voting, with the support of Elections Canada, to non-electors—those under the voting age.

Outside of that—I can't believe I did that in four minutes. I'm so sorry. That must have been too fast—I'd like to say thanks for having the opportunity to have four and a half minutes. I'd just like to point out that in our opinion, the most significant and important actors in our democracy right now are teachers and our schools. Schools play such an important and integral role in civic education. They don't need a whole curriculum around social studies or around how to be a

citizen. They just need great teachers who care about this. They can bring these opportunities into the curriculum. I hope that you'll help us continue to do that.

• (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

If I ever need a speed-speaking team, you're it.

I apologize, without looking at the translators, for how fast some of you were speaking.

We're going to go to a seven-minute round starting with Mr. Lukiwski.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Thank you very much.

And thank you all for being here today.

Before I begin with my questions, I just want to for the record perhaps set something straight. There was commentary that was provided by Mr. Lamoureux's mirror image, Mr. Simms, who was with us during the presentation by Mr. Neufeld, and that is that Mr. Simms brought the example forward of a woman in a care facility in his home province, in his riding actually, who he stated would not have been able to vote without the voter information card, because he said it was the only possible piece of identification that showed where she lived.

I point out that's absolutely false, because contained in the act is the ability for seniors who live in care facilities to merely get an attestation from the head of the facility, saying, “This woman lives here.” That's all they need. So she would have been able to vote, despite the protestations of Mr. Simms. I want to have that on the record.

For my question I think I'll first start with Mr. Fox. I think most Canadians who were paying any attention know, after the last election, the biggest controversy surrounded the robocall situation and Pierre Poutine, the still-unknown Pierre Poutine, who apparently had a fairly widespread and fairly orchestrated attempt of voter suppression. Now, the fair elections act, Bill C-23, deals with that very situation in that it uses the CRTC as the central repository for all voter contact services to register, and in fact without going into all of the details....

I know, Mr. Fox, your organization did fairly extensive studies on voter contact services, but when I asked former chief electoral officer Kingsley, who testified before this committee on Tuesday, if he believed the provisions contained in the fair elections act would prevent that very situation from occurring in the future, he said an unequivocal yes. I would like your opinion, since your organization did so much work on this very issue, about the government's proposal on regulating voter contact services and the role of the CRTC that is contained in Bill C-23.

• (1220)

Mr. Graham Fox: Thanks very much.

I'm not sure we can answer that question in absolutes in the sense that there will always be an exception. What I would say is, I think the provisions that are contained in the act, which echo a lot of the recommendations that we put forward in our report, would add a deterrent by raising the bar on what happens to you if you get caught. But I think in a response to 2011, the forced creation of a paper trail and the keeping of records all the way to who authorized the communication, who was communicated to, and what the script was that was used in those communications, I think, will really help after the fact if there needs to be an investigation, which in itself would be a deterrent.

The last thing I would say is, I also appreciate that the provisions aren't technology-specific, and that you didn't fall into the trap of going too far down into the specifics of was it a cellphone versus something else, was it a recorded message versus a text, which will allow you to keep up with technological advancement.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: I guess on behalf of our Chair, I can say that now we do have seven-minute rounds, you can probably take a little bit more time in the delivery of your answers. I would like to get a fulsome response to this.

Let's concentrate on the CRTC. In effect the act will make the CRTC almost like a one-stop-shop of sorts. Do you agree with the approach of using the CRTC as a central repository to try to record all of these calls that are being made and have an accurate record of who is making the calls, what they are saying, and to whom they're directed? Is this something that your organization approves of?

Mr. Graham Fox: Absolutely, and I think the addition of requiring the service provider to register, I think again, is an added safeguard if we ever need to go back to things that have happened in the past, and will share some responsibility and make it more explicit.

So I think that's positive, and you will have seen in our document that actually the CRTC, current and former, had representatives in our group at our round table. I would never pretend to speak for them, but I would say that there was a lot of support for the idea of the two organizations—Elections Canada and the CRTC—working together to help regulate this. I think there will be a lot of support even from them in acting in that way going forward.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Thank you for that. I think your comments echo what Mr. Kingsley was saying.

Mr. Kingsley did go a little further. You mentioned you were not here to give any absolutes. He did, in effect. He said his examination of the bill, with the provisions contained regarding what we commonly know now as robocalls, would prevent that orchestrated voter suppression attempt by whoever Pierre Poutine is from occurring in the future.

However, I guess one thing still is up for discussion, and that is how long records should be kept. Bill C-23, the fair elections act, recommends that all records be kept for one year so there is a record of what's happened and what occurred, in terms of script, calls made, calls received, and that type of thing.

Some of the opposition has been criticizing that. We feel that one year is a good balance because right now there's no requirement to keep records for any period of time.

One of the reasons that we are suggesting one year would be adequate is that if there is to be another situation—hopefully, there will not—where something like voter suppression through a robocall system is alerted, in all probability the investigation would commence almost immediately. With the trail that we propose to now regulate, we feel one year would be adequate.

Does your organization have any thoughts on whether keeping records for one year is adequate or too little?

● (1225)

Mr. Graham Fox: That time period is beyond the scope of our report. However, I would say that one year is definitely better than what we have now, which is nothing. I completely agree with you.

Given that the marginal additional costs of keeping that record once it has been put together for perhaps a longer period may not be too onerous on parties and service providers, and may give more time for issues and events to come to the surface after an election. I'd be open-minded about it being longer than one year.

The Chair: You have about four seconds.

Madame Des Rosiers, you wanted to add something very quickly.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: Very quickly, at U of T last week, there was a big debate, and one of the recommendations was that it be expanded to five years, and someone went as far as to say ten years. Certainly I think there was the idea that a bit longer would make the appearance all clear.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Scott, seven minutes from you today.

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

I'd like to give the last two minutes to Ms. May, if that's possible, and could you call me at five minutes?

The Chair: I'll stop you at five minutes and give the last two to Ms. May.

Mr. Craig Scott: Thank you.

I appreciate the line of questioning between Tom and Mr. Fox, and I think it's fair. The registry system is going to be better than nothing. I think it's a bit of a stretch to say that Mr. Kingsley said unequivocally that it would prevent...in an absolute way. He had criticisms that numbers won't be kept and that one year was too short; that's the minimum.

We also talked about "off the books". Anybody who is going to engage in a concerted effort these days knows that the system will be in place and will use sophisticated technology, perhaps proxy servers, off-the-book servers, burner phones, etc. The problem is that the registry system doesn't really account for that.

Mr. Fox, I'm wondering whether you would agree that the failure to include things to do with enhancing the investigative powers... The other end of deterrence is that people will know that it will be properly investigated. With regard to the lack of compulsion of witness, I don't know whether you agree it should be there, but it's a fact that it will make it more difficult to investigate.

Is that true?

Mr. Graham Fox: Again, that goes beyond the scope of the work we conducted. There was certainly a lot of discussion in our group of experts about whether we should consider enhancing the investigative powers of the Commissioner of Canada Elections.

Generally speaking, I think our group would have said that there is room for improvement. We didn't get into the specifics of what those proposals might be.

Mr. Craig Scott: That's great. Thank you.

I also do want to thank you and note the fact that Professor Des Rosiers pointed out the problems of restrictions on research. Under the current proposed subsection 20(1), the Treasury Board's approval will be required for the hiring of temporary specialists. The hiring of you to do that robocall research in the future would require the Treasury Board to approve that. I just want everybody to know that kind of work is precisely the kind of work that the Chief Electoral Officer should not be second-guessed on. So I thank you for the work.

I also wanted to quickly ask Ms. Loat a question. The minister has a propensity to take praise and blow it up. When you say that Mr. Poilievre is correct in highlighting that parties and candidates play a critical role in encouraging participation, I don't disagree. The fact of the matter is we do. We do that primarily to try to encourage people to vote for us for the substantive reasons. I think that's a very valid way to try to increase participation. My problem is with his "all or nothing" vision, that that's the only way citizens should be motivated.

I just wanted to make sure that everybody realizes that you're also recommending keeping the general public education function of Elections Canada, and that parties themselves should continue to do a better job motivating as well. Is that correct?

• (1230)

Ms. Alison Loat: That's correct.

In our submission, and also in my remarks, we had three recommendations on increasing citizen engagement and education, both during and in between elections. That would be done in non-partisan as well as multi-partisan ways. We do believe that political parties and candidates have an extremely important role to play in engaging electorate.

Our research suggests that there's a big bridge between where they could be and where they are, at least in the eyes of citizens. I do have concern about the low credibility that political parties have in the eyes of the public, and as I said, particularly given the quite generous public subsidies they receive.

I mentioned two points about Elections Canada: one, strengthening the role and encouraging them to do a better job; two, having an innovative funding and research program that's based on what we know works, whether Elections Canada is asked to measure results and share those and communicate those so that there's a broader understanding of what we can do to encourage greater voter participation. And third, I do suggest that some of the additional funds provided for political parties in this bill be allocated to voter education so that political parties are sending a message that they are serious about the very severe decline in participation, particularly among young people in this country.

Mr. Craig Scott: Great. Thank you for amplifying your presentation.

Now I think I'm just out of time and Ms. May can go.

The Chair: Very convenient.

Ms. May, two minutes, please.

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

I want to start by thanking Craig Scott for being so generous with his time.

I don't think we ever hear enough from witnesses when they're on panels and forced to speak so quickly, so I want to ask one question, which I will ask each of you to speak to, and I hope you can get as much as you can into your time and still breathe.

All of you represent non-partisan, non-profit organizations, with expertise on the issues currently plaguing Canada in terms of voter turnout and fair elections. I appreciate your evidence today. I want to know from each of you, do you believe Bill C-23, the so-called fair elections act, will help or hurt the health of Canadian democracy?

Mr. Taylor Gunn: I'll give you the answer you don't want to hear, which is it's not passed yet, which means there's lots of room for all the changes that I think we've suggested. That's my answer.

Mr. Graham Fox: I would agree with Taylor. I think there's a lot of room for important changes to the bill, but I think if those changes come through it will help.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: It's very important that some attention be paid to the robocall issue, but if it can be split off and the rest of it be engaged in a more fruitful debate, I think that's what we're suggesting. Improvement is needed.

Ms. Alison Loat: I think I'd probably agree with everybody. There are some good aspects, but lots of opportunity for improvement.

Ms. Elizabeth May: From my point of view, and having had a chance to speak to the bill at second reading, I made it clear I also support the regulation of robocalls, and the way that's being handled. I think the key significant pieces that need to be reformed before the bill passes relate to getting rid of the vouching provisions, getting rid of the voter ID cards, and getting rid of Elections Canada's role in public education. If those pieces aren't improved before passage, would you believe this bill does more to hurt or help Canadian democracy?

The Chair: A very short answer from each them—a second to each.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: I do think that diminishing the role of Elections Canada will be bad for Canada.

Ms. Alison Loat: Agreed.

Mr. Graham Fox: Based on our work, it would have to be no.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: My health card, embarrassingly enough, is my only piece of official ID, and it doesn't have my address on it. So my wife couldn't vouch for me—that's my personal opinion—but obviously I have a couple of years, hopefully, to fix that.

The Chair: Okay.

Ms. Elizabeth May: I'm proud of anyone who, at your age, doesn't have a driver's licence. Thank you very much for your testimony.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: I have the TTC.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. May.

We'll move on to Mr. Lamoureux.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): I appreciate the quick answers. I can tell you that I don't think there is anyone outside of the government who is actually proposing that we get rid of vouching. So it's reassuring when we hear from non-profits or independent groups coming before the committee, reinforcing how critically important it is that we retain vouching. I understand there might be need for some amendment or ways we can modify it, but you don't have to kill vouching. That's an important aspect to our democracy.

I wanted to pick up on the robocalls, because that is an issue that tens of thousands of Canadians are very familiar with. Literally thousands of phone calls were made to Elections Canada because of what had taken place.

One of the biggest criticisms of the elections bill was that Elections Canada was not being afforded the opportunity to compel witnesses. I think, Mr. Fox, you indicated something to the effect of what happens to you if you get caught. Getting caught can be a problem for the simple reason that they just have to say, "no comment". They don't have to show up.

My question to you is this. How important do you think it is that Elections Canada or the commissioner have the ability to compel a witness to provide testimony?

• (1235)

Mr. Graham Fox: I think giving the investigator the ability to compel witnesses would be a positive addition to the bill.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: The other issue—I'm not sure who raised it, it might have been you Mr. Fox—is an issue we don't hear enough about it, the whole issue of privacy. We do have these huge data banks. All political parties have data banks. It's very limited in terms of what's there to protect the voters on this particular issue.

How would you recommend, or who should oversee...? Should it be the privacy commissioner? Should it be Elections Canada? How do we protect the voters with these data banks, in your opinion?

Mr. Graham Fox: I'll leave it to experts to express a definitive view on that. I would say the expertise currently resides at the privacy commission, so I would start there. And I think I would look at the Privacy Act and at extending certain provisions to political party activity—and I think it's important to say—without going all the way to preventing political parties from communicating with voters or knowing more about us. I think it's important for democratic activity to make sure political parties can do that legitimately and without too heavy a regulatory burden. But it is

almost nonsense in the information age that we're allowed to keep those databases without any kind oversight about what happens to information that's about us.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: I think that's the major point here, and in fact, something could have been incorporated into the legislation that at the very least would have dealt with the issue. Is that a fair comment?

Mr. Graham Fox: It's a fair comment, and I would say a separate bill could deal with that as well, but it's definitely a policy gap that we have identified, that others have identified, and that needs to be dealt with.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Right.

Mr. Gunn, I read part of your report, and it was interesting that you make reference to a resolution on February 17, 2004, and this is what it states:

That the House direct the Chief Electoral Officer and Elections Canada to expand its initiatives to promote the participation of young Canadians in the electoral process and that these initiatives include making available educational material to schools and other organizations and supporting parallel voting opportunities for prospective electors during federal elections, including making available polling materials and the publication of results of such parallel voting, and that Elections Canada work creatively with such groups as Kids Voting Canada, Scouts Canada, Guides Canada, teachers and others and provide regular reports on these matters to the House of Commons through the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

And this is something that was supported by all parties back in 2004. Now, this legislation does not do that, and I'm wondering if you want to provide comment on that.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: I put this in just because it was hard-earned, to engage Elections Canada at the beginning to do this. This has been a 10-year effort and they said no to us many times, and it might have just been that they weren't yet ready to interpret the existing section 18 as something that would allow them to, say, work with future electors, as we were proposing. Luckily, MPs in the House disagreed and they basically told Elections Canada at that time to work with us. That name, Kids Voting Canada, was the first name we came up with.

So they put that in it and the very next day we received a call from Elections Canada asking us to go to Ottawa and meet with the chief election officer to begin to speak about how they could potentially support us. I'd like to point out too they didn't always support the entire cost of the Student Vote program. It started with in-kind contributions, no cash towards our time, for example, and through much heavy negotiation—that's probably a polite way to put it—and also an accident of the 2008 federal election falling on Labour Day weekend, which I don't think they were prepared for, they had to cover the full cost if they wanted us to operate. Now since that time they've done so.

•(1240)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Yes, and I raise it because we have seen a flip-flop in attitude from the government. At one time they supported Elections Canada and they voted to go out, reach out for Elections Canada and today what we're seeing is quite the opposite. All four presenters articulated how important it is that Elections Canada have the ability to communicate with the public.

If the amendment is not brought forward, could you see this as good legislation, by tying the hands of Elections Canada in any form, if that amendment does not succeed? Just a very quick yes or no from each presenter would be much appreciated, or a three-second comment.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: I think I made my position on that clear in the remarks.

Mr. Graham Fox: We need to preserve the public education function, for sure.

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: That's what I said. I think it's not going to be good for Canada if Elections Canada cannot continue in a public education function.

Ms. Alison Loat: I agree and I also think that in my remarks I tried to strengthen it further by arguing that they could actually be doing a better job. I think there have been some concerns articulated. Mr. Reid, who was here earlier, articulated some concerns about the advertising. I think if we had a more rigorous approach of assessing what worked and didn't and had that shared, I think we could make amendments to encourage that sort of behaviour that might even strengthen it further.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Again, I caution the members about asking complex questions with two seconds left in their rounds.

Mr. Richards, for four minutes, please....

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Thank you.

I'm going to follow along on the education part of it as well here. I think what we're talking about is voter turnout when we're talking about the education and the information. I think there are two things that drive voter turnout. The first one is motivation to vote, and the second one is information about voting. Obviously, information is the responsibility of Elections Canada—that's quite clear—letting people know how to vote, where to vote, when to vote. Their own data show that they have been doing a fairly poor job of it.

After the last election, there were reports of young non-voters not knowing where to vote, 25% of them saying they didn't know where to vote. Twenty-six percent didn't know when to vote. Nineteen percent didn't know how to vote. So obviously that would have played a role in their decision not to vote. So that's a barrier there.

I wanted to just ask Mr. Gunn and maybe Ms. Loat—I want to ask you to be quite brief because I've only got three minutes left at this point—if you could just give us a bit of your sense...that tells us about the information part of it, but the motivation part is the part I'd like to ask you about. Can you give us any insights? What are your feelings as to what motivates a person to vote? Obviously the approach of Elections Canada means millions of dollars spent in the last several years, and it doesn't seem to be working.

Tell us what your feelings are, again, briefly. What motivates someone to vote?

Mr. Taylor Gunn: Mr. Richards, I just had a problem hearing on that last one. I just wasn't sure if you were implying that the money spent on the Student Vote program wasn't working or the money spent by Elections Canada in general?

Mr. Blake Richards: What I'm really asking you to do is just to tell me what motivates someone to vote, in your opinion. What's the motivation?

Mr. Taylor Gunn: Sure. I also would like to take this moment to talk for a quick second, because that's probably all I have, Mr. Preston. I may be either wrong or a total outlier on this—and I brought this up with you personally—but I don't believe so much in the access or information barriers. I actually think that those.... I put them in a category called—

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry, but I have to ask you to be very brief and—

Mr. Taylor Gunn: Sure.

I call those excuses. Those are excuses that people use if they are not going to vote or if they didn't vote in an election. The real barrier is I think interest, knowledge, a sense of civic duty.... If you're interested in something, you're going to make it a priority, right?

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Thank you. I'll have to stop you there, because I want to allow Ms. Loat to speak, and I do have one follow-up question for both of you.

Very briefly, please.

Ms. Alison Loat: It's a terrific question.

We run a program called Democracy Talks that works with young people and newcomers to Canada. We run focus group work with them. There are three things that come up on the motivation side that I think are deeper than what you can get at from some of the statistics that you've probably been presented. One is that there's an overwhelming sentiment—these are people who don't participate—that voting—

Mr. Blake Richards: May I remind you to be very brief? I want to get a follow-up question.

Ms. Alison Loat: They don't see voting as something that Canadians value. It's not introduced to people in citizenship. Often it's not taught well in schools, with the exception of Student Vote, and many people say their friends and family have never encouraged them to do it. That's one.

Second, voting is not the first step for most people. Most people who have to engage—

•(1245)

Mr. Blake Richards: I'm sorry, but I—

Ms. Alison Loat: Third, it has to come from a trusted intermediary.

Those are the three further barriers on motivation.

Mr. Blake Richards: Okay. Thank you. I need to get to my second question.

Talking about motivation, I look at that really being a role for us as political parties and politicians: to encourage people and to motivate them to get out and vote. I've looked at the last couple of elections in the United States, for example—and I think you would probably both agree with me—and at what motivated people to get out to vote there. It was being inspired by a politician, being inspired to get out and vote, being a part of issues, being inspired by someone. Would that be something that you would agree with? Yes or no, please.

The Chair: Again, we have a two-second kind of framework.

Ms. Alison Loat: There is research done on this. These are great questions. The candidate and the party absolutely matter. A secondary thing, though, where voter turnout went up where it hadn't before, was work that was done with intermediary organizations that had trusted relationships with people in communities. I think it's not just candidates or just schools; it's the two together. That's what is so critical about section 18. Hopefully I've made some good suggestions on that dimension that would allow both multi-partisan and non-partisan efforts to be made to encourage greater participation.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Christopherson, you're starting off the four-minute round, which apparently you're sharing with Madam Latendresse.

Mr. David Christopherson: I am. Thank you, Chair. That saves me from having to say it.

I would also like to use my time to advise you of a notice of motion.

Earlier today, the government attempted a drive-by smear and, in addition, tried to find a political diversion from the train wreck that is these hearings in terms of their shredded bill C-23. This is a referral from the House. Given the fact that it attacks my party and my leader, we feel that it should be dealt with immediately.

Not only are we in compliance with all of the rules, but we're proud of the outreach work that we're doing, and therefore, I move the following motion:

That, pursuant to the motion adopted by the House of Commons on Thursday, March 27, 2014 relating to the Official Opposition, the Committee invite the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, and also invite the Right Honourable Prime Minister to appear before the Committee to address the many partisan activities undertaken by his government, specifically by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and by the Conservative Research Group (CRG), and that furthermore, the current study on C-23 be extended by the same number of days as those scheduled for the study on the referred motion.

With that, I turn the floor over to my colleague, Madam Latendresse.

An hon. member: If I could be on the order paper for that motion...?

The Chair: I'm not going to the motion today. He's given us notice of motion.

Madam Latendresse, there are two minutes left. Well, it's a minute and a half, or two and a half, or some combination thereof.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their presentations, but also for the work they do in general to improve our electoral system.

My question is addressed to all of the witnesses.

In your opinion, what will be the effect—on electoral participation particularly—of the fact that we will be abolishing both the use of vouchers and the use of the voter information card, which until now allowed people to vote on election day?

Ms. Nathalie Des Rosiers: The problem is that we do not really know what the impact of those decisions will be. In a way, the approach consists here in saying that it is very dangerous to do things that could shrink and restrict the pool of electors. To the extent that those two factors could have the effect of restricting anyone's access to voting, this represents a loss for our democracy. Even if one person is prevented from voting, we would consider that unacceptable. According to the precautionary principle, we have to make sure that all of those who have the right to vote have the right and the privilege to exercise their franchise easily.

Mr. Graham Fox: For my part, I agree entirely with Ms. Des Rosiers. My first concern is that we do not know what impact this is going to have. We don't know who will be the most affected, nor whether there will be differences from region to region or according to demographic groups. I think that at the very least we have to know more about this measure before it is applied across the board.

● (1250)

[*English*]

Ms. Alison Loat: As a general policy and principle, the more that can be done to increase and encourage access to voting, I think is good. The evidence I've seen presented suggests that vouching will harm that principle.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: I'll leave these three and the previous CEOs to be the experts on vouching. I can only offer my personal experience with my health card.

The Chair: Thank you for finishing right on time, Madame Latendresse.

Mr. Reid, you have four minutes to finish this off, please.

Mr. Scott Reid: Thank you.

Anybody can answer my question but I wanted to direct it to Taylor Gunn. Taylor phoned me and I suspect some other members of the committee beforehand, and we had a good discussion and it was very helpful. I appreciate that. I also like your multicoloured presentation, which I'll show to my webmaster as to how we could goose up our own presentation.

Finally before I ask this serious question I can't help but notice in your helpful compendium on participation in different schools where you've listed all members of the committee. In my riding, Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, in 2011, I won the student vote. There were 31 schools registered and 2,884 ballots cast and just for the record that is more votes cast than in the chair's and two vice-chairs' ridings put together.

The Chair: The decision was too easy in the chair's riding.

Mr. Scott Reid: I'm just saying.

My question relates to the education role you guys have. One of the problems that I have felt exists, and I've felt this for many years, is that there is inadequate education as to how to vote. I think you and I may disagree a little about whether people vote because they are insufficiently motivated versus encountering genuine barriers to voting.

This is just my thought and then I'll let you answer, but here, Taylor, is what I wanted to say. We do know from the CEO's report on lack of youth participation, that when young voters—he divided the young people into five groups—cited reasons why they hadn't participated, three of the groups—and I can't remember which of the three subcategories it was—indicated that one of the primary reasons was lack of voter information materials, voter information cards, which among other things tell you where to vote. It does serve as a prompt. Many people carry these things into the poll. I did; it was a helpful reminder of here's where and when the advanced poll is, that kind of thing. They don't get those things.

If you're in the schools I think it would be useful for kids as part of your education process, when they are too young to vote but are at home. Then they move away to go to college and they can vote, but now we've lost track of them. Helping to educate them on how to exercise that franchise a couple of years in the future would be an enormously useful service.

I'm recommending you do something like that. I'm going to ask you to comment on that or general issues in relation to that.

Mr. Taylor Gunn: That's a great recommendation. Hopefully other members can agree that it's a great recommendation so that I can incorporate a great recommendation from the committee rather than just one partisan member.

I've always found voter information cards to be useful. I think voters now have a habit of recognizing and using those. Obviously that should carry on. I don't know if this is so relative to the committee—but certain election agencies across the country have attempted to explore whether or not they could share information with their provincial counterparts—the Ministry of Education, for example, so that as young people went through school, they were automatically put on the registered voters list. Does that help them if they move away to school and they're sharing a place and only one person has their name on that house as residence? I don't think so in the case of voter information cards. If it comes to be that this passes and section 18 is restricted, we'll focus our information that we provide to schools. Everyone will put more energy into just the when, where, and how to vote.

I think the bill is trying to imply that someone shouldn't be trying to tell people why to vote. I can understand that. But the why comes from the when, where, and how. At least in our program, when you go into a school with your fellow candidates, you're not teaching the why. The kids figure out the why. When they go home and talk to their parents, that's where they learn the why.

I feel that even the previous section 18, the current section 18, could be interpreted in exactly the same way. It would be great just to have the committee clarify that especially around things like civic education and public engagement.

•(1255)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Gunn.

The Chair: To all witnesses, I can understand we tend to always go over when witnesses are passionate about what they're here to present to us. So thank you all today for what you've done. Thank you for coming and sharing with us.

I've got just a couple of pieces of information for all of the committee, if you could, please, just bear with me for a second.

But we do thank our witnesses and excuse them.

We talked a bit about amendments that will be needed. We're suggesting Friday, April 25, at noon if you're submitting amendments to the clerk. Ask me how flexible I'll be on that. Clause-by-clause will be scheduled to start at what would be our regularly scheduled meeting, Tuesday, April 29, at the 11 a.m. start.

Pardon?

Mr. David Christopherson: We've not agreed to that yet. We haven't deal with the other.... I stand to be corrected but to the best of my knowledge, all we've agreed on so far is next week. We still have further discussions talking about going forward.

The Chair: We have a delegation from Scotland with some informal gatherings about electoral reform and other issues they'd like to speak to us about. Monday, April 7, is when they're here. I'm suggesting a half hour in the morning. The vice-chairs, myself, or the whole committee or whoever would like to.... A notice or a letter will come out from me asking for that, please.

Pardon?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: That meeting will be here?

The Chair: That will be here in Centre Block some place I would hope, Mr. Lamoureux.

With direction from the steering committee, we've started scheduling for next week. We have finished scheduling for next week. We finished scheduling for the rest. It's not all available because we're still doing some invites.

This committee will be working Monday evenings, 7 to 11. Tuesday, normal time, 11 to 1. Tuesday evening, the same timeframe, 7 to 11. Wednesday evening, the same timeframe, 7 to 11. Normal meeting time on Thursday, 11 to 1.

That will happen through all the weeks that we're sitting studying this. I promised that we would give as much opportunity to every witness who is asked to be here and for any witness to send briefs and the like. That will accomplish that. We've also reduced the size from four to a maximum of three on groups, like we just had, to try to make that work a little bit better too.

So if you give the.... As the steering committee did the other day... allowed the chair and the clerk to move forward on that and started that scheduling and with the competent work of the committee, I'm sure we can accomplish the rest.

I would assume then that sometime after 11 on Monday night is when we'll deal with Mr. Christopherson's motion.

Sorry, Dave, that was just a joke.

Anything else for the good of the committee today?

We are adjourned.

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