



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 009**

Thursday, February 17, 2022

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Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger





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Thursday, February 17, 2022

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

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

I welcome you to the ninth meeting of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

The committee is meeting today to hold a briefing with the Chief Electoral Officer.

I remind all participants that no screen shots or photos of their screen are allowed.

[*English*]

I understand that everyone has the public health guidelines that have been provided. I will take your heads nodding and thumbs up as signals that you have read them and that you will all follow them.

I will just remind everyone that all comments are to be made through the chair. The more we can address our comments through the chair, the less you will hear from the chair.

With that, I will pass the virtual screen over to our guests today, who we're really excited to have. We have with us Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer, who is accompanied by Michel Rousset, deputy chief electoral officer, electoral events and innovation.

I understand it will be Mr. Perrault providing comments for approximately six minutes.

Over to you. Welcome to PROC.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada):** Thank you, Madam Chair, for the opportunity to speak with the Committee today about the 44th general election.

While no election is like any other, it is safe to say that this was one of the most challenging in our history. I would like at the very outset to express my gratitude to the 338 returning officers and their staff, as well as the 195,000 Canadians who served their fellow citizens to the best of their ability in sometimes difficult circumstances.

[*English*]

I had indicated to this committee last year that we would be in a position to deliver a safe election, and I can confirm that this was the case.

A range of measures to protect electors and poll workers was implemented in consultation with public health authorities across the country, and we continued to adjust those measures throughout the election as the situations evolved locally.

Various service options were also offered to long-term care facilities and seniors' homes to reflect the needs and circumstances of each institution and serve electors who reside there.

While the election was safe, the pandemic presented a number of challenges. These were not unforeseen. As I had indicated to this committee prior to the election, recruiting and training poll workers and securing polling places were the main concerns, and they proved to be difficult. This was particularly true of polling places. In a normal election, approximately half of the electors would be assigned to vote at a nearby school. This time, schools and other usual polling places were generally unavailable.

In preparing for the election, returning officers worked to identify and confirm alternative locations. However, once the election was called, several landlords who had earlier indicated they would rent to us reversed their decision in the context of the emerging fourth wave. Difficulties in confirming polling locations led to delays in issuing voter information cards.

This did not prevent us from increasing the number of advance polls by 18% to meet an expected increase in early voting. But it did have an impact on services on polling day, especially in some urban centres—around Toronto in particular—where the scarcity of polling places led to longer wait times.

To support recruitment, our enhanced national recruitment campaign emphasized the measures in place to protect the health and safety of election workers. At the local level, there were efforts to recruit bilingual election workers and those in indigenous communities. Overall, we recruited 15% fewer poll workers than in the previous election.

Apart from these overarching challenges, there were specific areas in which our services were below expectations.

Students in particular were disappointed that we were unable to offer vote-on-campus kiosks. This initiative was piloted in 2015 and deployed more broadly in 2019, but in each case it required many months of planning and coordination with post-secondary institutions. Pandemic circumstances and the lack of a fixed-date election meant that we were unable to offer it this time. Our goal moving forward is to make campus kiosks part of our permanent service offerings.

As with previous elections, returning officers reached out to all first nations communities in their electoral districts to arrange polling operations. Unfortunately, some first nations electors in parts of Kenora in Ontario were unable to vote as a result of errors and miscommunication. I apologize to these electors, and we are putting in place measures to improve our services to first nations communities across Canada.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Finally, several measures were implemented to assist voters who wished to vote by mail, including a new online application system, prepaid postage, a special information campaign and a ballot drop-off service at local polls, which we have set up by adapting the act through bill C-19. Procedures were also put in place to ensure the integrity of the process, which meant that the preliminary voting results took several days to complete.

Knowing that election results would not all be available on election night this time, and in the shadow of inaccurate information surrounding the 2020 US election, we took steps to maintain confidence in the process and results. We communicated early and often and were very transparent about the measures we put in place to make voting accessible and secure, as well as to ensure its integrity. I believe that this level of transparency was instrumental in preserving trust in the election. Preliminary results from our post-election surveys of electors indicate that trust and satisfaction levels remained very high.

I will now turn briefly to the ongoing electoral boundaries redistribution exercise. Canada has a robust process to ensure that the periodic redrawing of electoral boundaries is done in an independent and non-partisan manner. In October, I announced that the number of seats in the House of Commons will increase to 342. This figure is calculated, as required by law, using the July 1, 2021 population estimates provided by the Chief Statistician and a formula found in the Constitution. I would like to remind members that the calculation done to determine the number of seats allocated to each province is a mathematical operation over which I exercise no discretionary authority.

The 10 independent commissions were created last fall. Their work began on February 9 with the receipt of the census population numbers. Over the next 10 months, each commission will develop boundary proposals, hold public hearings—where members of the public and MPs may make presentations—and complete a report on the new electoral districts. These reports will be submitted to the Speaker for tabling in the House of Commons and referred to this committee starting in fall 2022. Over the next few weeks, my team will be providing technical briefings on the redistribution process at

the various party caucuses in the House. You will have more detailed information on the electoral map revision process.

Thank you for inviting me today. I welcome your questions.

• (1110)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much for your comments.

[*English*]

Now we will start round one, which is a six-minute round.

Mr. Duncan, the floor is yours.

**Mr. Eric Duncan (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, Madam Chair, thank you to Mr. Perrault for being here today and for meeting with me, I think, a couple of months ago. I lose track of time.

I want to follow up about the cost. In the report on page 40, the last estimated cost of the election was \$630 million. That was a month ago.

Do you have an updated number at this point?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** The number at this point remains an estimate of \$630 million. It's an estimate, because not all costs—for example, reimbursement of candidates and parties—are complete as we do the audits. However, I'm fairly confident in that figure.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you.

I've had a chance to read the report that you tabled with us, and I'd like to know about the challenges with special ballots and the number that weren't returned on time. There was a significant number from those who applied within a riding and a larger number from those who applied from outside the country or outside their riding.

Can you talk about some of the changes you're looking at implementing to get that percentage of returns up higher in future elections?

Also, would you agree with me that in our country, there's a geographic challenge for Canada Post when somebody submits a ballot in B.C. or Yukon and it has to get to Ottawa by the date of the election? Is that a logistical challenge that we have?

**The Chair:** I'm going to jump in quickly and remind all members that we will make comments through the chair.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Just as a point of clarification, for electors voting in their electoral districts by mail, one of the aspects that was in place was that they voted locally, in the sense that the mail was sent to the local returning officer so as to prevent that transit time from wherever they are to Ottawa. It is only out-of-district electors who vote and send their ballots nationally.

I did indicate in my remarks a range of measures that we put in place to reduce the number of late ballots. I'm not going to repeat them. Obviously, any late ballot is unfortunate. These are people who wanted to cast a ballot and who cast a ballot, but we were not able to count them.

I had recommended a longer election period. If you look at the results from table 4 in the report, it shows that there was a much lower percentage of late ballots with just a few days. Now, that's not the only factor. I had also recommended that ballots received one day after close of the polls be counted, and this was indeed part of Bill C-19. This is something that we may want to look at in the future.

I think we delayed on our side to look at our communications strategy: Was it aggressive enough? I know that in Canada at the federal level electors who vote by mail or by special ballot must write in the name of the candidate. They cannot vote by writing in the name of the party. That is not so in some of the provinces, so this means that people who apply early have to wait until the close of nominations to see the full slate of candidates. Again, that is something that we could look at to change the rules so that voting by party would be acceptable, such that we could promote voting by mail much more aggressively in the early stages of the campaign.

We have never had such a large-scale vote-by-mail operation, and we're looking at every angle to see how it can be improved in the future.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Thank you for that.

One of the things you addressed was the question about the time frame. That was a supplemental I had, through you, Madam Chair.

Also, again, in one of the things geographically within the country, with all the ballots going back to one location, there's a difference for me, for example, in Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, for the mail to get back to Ottawa. I have more time to safely deliver that in the mail to get it to Ottawa than, say, in British Columbia, or in the north for more remote communities. I think it's something that Elections Canada needs to look at in the future in terms of perhaps decentralizing where the ballots are received or considered received by election day, and I would leave that for your consideration.

One of the things you mentioned was that, yes, the unnecessary pandemic election created an unfortunate opportunity where we had fewer polling locations. Can we get a commitment from you today? Hopefully, we're not into another election during a pandemic—for multiple reasons—but regardless of that, whether it's considered a pandemic election or not, is Elections Canada committed to increasing the number of polling locations across the country back to the more normal number?

• (1115)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I can assure you that we have done all we could in the last election, and we will do again everything we can to increase the number of polling locations at any election. One of the considerations there that I put forward was that having a vote on a Monday eliminates the schools, practically speaking.

That is something to consider for the future. If we want to have schools available, we may have to abandon Monday voting. That is something for Parliament to decide and, of course, we will administer the election in whichever way Parliament chooses, but we will continue to look for all alternative ways of finding polling locations.

Madam Chair, I would note that in this election we had some quite unusual polling locations. We had soccer stadiums, we had the Olympic stadium in Montreal and we had commercial premises such as IKEA stores and Costco centres. I don't think there was a lack of creativity on the part of returning officers, but the reality is that there are only so many places that are available, that meet accessibility standards and that can be open to us on a Monday.

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** In the interests of time, I will get to one other angle that I raised with you in our meeting a couple of months ago, which is the cross-training of election officials at polling sites.

No matter how many days of advance polls, hours and service that you provide to people, the unfortunate reality from a logistical perspective is that everybody will show up the first day at the first hour. One of the challenges was that we had people working at doors greeting or providing hand sanitizer or doing something, but we had one person working the list at an advance poll table. The line out the door was so long that it created massive challenges.

Would you agree with the cross-training of employees so that during busy times a door greeter could come off and perhaps get voters out the door quicker after they cast their ballots? I firmly believe that several Canadians.... I won't say a number, but many people left and didn't vote because they saw the lines as being too long and they didn't bother going back. Any feedback or comments you have on that would be appreciated.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Certainly anything that can be done to reduce the lineups is an important thing to look at.

Training is a challenge. We offer three hours of training for poll workers. It is difficult to offer more training than that. We ask our poll supervisors to attend training for all positions and we can certainly look at increasing opportunities for additional training. It's not clear to me how much progress we'll be able to make, but training is one aspect.

The logistics of the poll is another. I think when we talked I indicated my interest in introducing some technology at the poll, as is done in provincial jurisdictions, to manage the list in ways that are more efficient.

We'll look at different ways to manage the service to make it more effective for electors. At the end of the day, we certainly want to reduce those lineups.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll turn the floor over to Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.):** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Perrault, thank you for being here. It's good to see you, and thanks for your report. I thought it was really detailed.

I have a number of questions, as always.

I know Minister LeBlanc sent you a letter last year asking you to look into the issue of hate groups and the potential for them to register as political parties in order to get privileged access to important legitimate tools for political parties such as tax rebates and the list of electors.

Can you speak to the work that has been undertaken since then to address these issues?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you for the question—

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, I don't mean to be rude, but that wasn't through the chair. We just need to have some consistent enforcement whenever we have that. I don't mean to be partial or question your impartiality, but that wasn't through the chair.

Thanks.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.):** However, as a follow-up—

**The Chair:** I had given you two rounds before I jumped in, so I was going to do the same.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** That's through you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your assistance, always.

Mr. Perrault.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** This is a matter of concern to me that hate groups not be able to use the privileges afforded in the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act, whether it's lists of electors or whether it's access to special platforms, broadcasting time or tax credits.

I have been looking into this. I have a recommendation report coming in April, and that will be an aspect of the report. It is, of course, a difficult issue and I think it's not for the chief electoral officer to arbitrate between groups. There may be mechanisms that we can put forward that would at least allow us some safeguards against hate groups getting access to those privileges.

I'll look forward to sharing that report with the members of Parliament.

• (1120)

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** I definitely look forward to hearing any progress on safeguards that can be put in place, because it is deeply concerning to think about what effects that would have on our democratic institutions if that happens.

I also note that in your report, on page 33, you mentioned there were 111 incidents of security issues, I guess, and I think 78 of them, on page 34, required police intervention. This seems quite concerning.

Can you tell us about those events, and can you speak to the role of hateful rhetoric that political parties use, specifically the official opposition, in contributing to these kinds of events?

That's through you, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Obviously, for us, it was quite disquieting to see some of the behaviour that we saw at the polls. This was not something that we have seen in the past, and certainly not to that extent, and the level of vitriol was quite disappointing.

Canadians working at the polls are just ordinary Canadians, serving fellow citizens, for one day. Often they're seniors. Therefore, it is disturbing to see the level of aggressivity that we saw during this election.

I think much of it was related to tensions around COVID-19 and COVID-19 measures. I'm hopeful, though not fully confident, that it will go down in the future. However, if we want to have poll workers, we need to have voters respect the poll workers who come and work to serve them during the election. That's the nature of our democracy.

**Mr. Brad Vis (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, CPC):** On a point of order, Madam Chair, if I understand correctly, did Mr. Turnbull just accuse the official opposition of committing crimes during the election?

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Are you referring to the question? I did not hear that within his commentary.

I'm going to let Mr. Perrault finish and go through this exchange of time.

If we need to address it between questioners we can definitely get to that.

Mr. Perrault, back to you.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you.

I was just saying how we, in Canada, cherish the degree of civility that we normally experience when we go to the polls. We all know that most people in a room may disagree with us and don't vote the same way but there's a level of respect,

[*Translation*]

a calmness

[*English*]

—that takes place and that we need to maintain.

It was disturbing to see that. Hopefully, we nurture more civil behaviour at the polls.

There was a fair amount of aggression. There were also a few cases of physical assault, and that's not what we want to see.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

I certainly note that the level of vitriol in the past election seemed to be far greater than the one before. I certainly experienced much of that aggression and rhetoric in my community. It's deeply concerning for volunteers as well who are participating and who don't sign up for that kind of treatment. It's deeply concerning for me.

Also, along a similar line of questioning to Mr. Duncan's I'll ask you a question about some of the special or mail-in ballots.

I note that in your report on page 25 it states there were just over 114,000 special or mail-in ballots not returned or cancelled.

Can you provide some insight as to what would cause this discrepancy? For instance, is it safe to assume that some Canadians requested a mail-in ballot and then decided to vote in person?

To add to that, if you have a chance, is the 9% cancellation or non-return rate traditionally high or is it about average?

Thanks very much.

**The Chair:** I will take that comment through the chair.

I can now understand, Mr. Perrault, the frustration and difficulty because we've been having elections for so long. This committee has now been meeting several times and I'm still working on making sure comments are addressed through the chair.

Mr. Perrault.

• (1125)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you.

The percentages of cancelled or not returned ballots is higher than in the past. If you look at the table on the next page it was 4% in the last election and here it's at 9%.

There is a difference, though. In this election, I did make some adaptations to the act because of the unique circumstances and did allow an elector who would show up on polling day and who had received a kit or applied for a special ballot but perhaps received it too late and perhaps did not quite understand that there was a drop-box service.... We did not turn those voters away. We had them swear an oath and we allowed them to vote—

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.):** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Perrault.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** My apologies.

There's a lot of side chatter in the room and I can't actually hear the witness.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** I'm going to remind members that we are in a public committee and we have asked these witnesses to come and exchange with us today.

I recognize that tensions are high but this is not what we usually come across.

I'm going to ask us to take a breath and refocus on the PROC committee talking about the election with the Chief Electoral Officer.

Mr. Perrault, the screen is yours.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As I was explaining, given the unique circumstances this election met I adapted the legislation. So an elector who would come up on polling day and had applied for a special ballot, had not brought it, and misunderstood the drop-box service that we had, was allowed to vote on a sworn oath that he or she did not vote. We confirmed that by checking after the election, before the count was completed, that no special ballot had in fact been cast.

The separation within the 114,000, between those who simply chose not to vote and those who chose to vote by another means, is something that we need to look into. To do that we need to pry open all of the bags coming back from all parts of the country. That's a long process, but I'm confident that we will be able to report on that in the breakdown between those who chose not to vote and those who chose to vote otherwise.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that exchange.

Mr. Vis, before I go to Mr. Barsalou-Duval I will remind all committee members to be mindful of tone and commentary. We are here to obtain information so that we can improve our institutions and our systems.

Mr. Vis, your comments have been noted and I will definitely be more attentive to what you're asking.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, the floor is yours for six minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would also like to thank Mr. Perrault for being here. We are pleased to have a report from Elections Canada.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the people at Elections Canada, who had to face many challenges with an election in the middle of a pandemic, in a context where they had to turn around very quickly to find solutions to problems. In spite of everything, we can see that there was relative success, despite failures, because there is still confidence in our electoral system.

I would like to congratulate you on this. I'm about to ask you some questions that may be a bit critical—don't take them too hard, because we can always do better.

In your opening remarks, you addressed the issue of electoral map reform. This is obviously of interest to us, I would even say of great concern to us in the Bloc Québécois. In what is being proposed, Quebec would lose a seat. Since Quebec is a nation, we believe that a minimum weight must be ensured for Quebec to have a voice in Ottawa. We understand that the results are based on a formula and not on your discretionary power to establish the number of ridings per province.

That being said, given the particularities of Quebec and the fact that, in the Supreme Court and the Senate, for example, there is a minimal space reserved for Quebec, don't you think it would be fair for an adaptation to ensure that we have a relative weight in recognition of the national character of Quebec?

**The Chair:** Mr. Barsalou-Duval, welcome to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

That being said, I would remind you that comments and questions should be addressed to the Chair. Thank you.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** I am sorry, Madam Chair.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

First of all, as far as the confidence of the voters is concerned, this is something that has to be earned every time, but we are very happy to see the high level of confidence expressed, which is similar to what we have seen in past elections. This is good.

I apologize Madam Chair for making a small correction. We often talk about a proposal, but we understand that it is simply a mathematical formula that follows from the act.

The Constitution recognizes the general principle of proportionality in the representation of the provinces, while having, over the years, made certain accommodations for smaller provinces or for all sorts of circumstances. It is up to the political class, within the parameters of the Constitution, to find a balance between proportionality and interests other than proportionality. I don't think it's the Chief Electoral Officer's place to interfere in this debate. I have to work to support the commissions in their role, and I will do that with the data within the legal framework that is provided to me.

• (1130)

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, given what has been described so far regarding the redistribution process, in a context where there has been no expressed will by Parliament regarding the future electoral map, I would like to ask Mr. Perrault if, for example, there would not be any accommodations, any changes made to this famous formula. As far as Elections Canada is concerned, if the redistribution process is started right away, is it because the government has indicated that there would be no changes?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, I am not aware of the intentions of any party or the government to introduce bills. I know that the Bloc Québécois has introduced one.

Periodically, the amending formula has been revised relatively frequently, but not every 10 years since Canada was founded in 1867. It is not a constant, it is not necessarily reviewed every time. That's all I can say about that.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** I understand, therefore, that Elections Canada has not received any communication from the government as to whether or not there will be any changes to the formula.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** No, there is no communication in either direction.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** My next question is still related to redistribution, since we are talking about it, but there are other subjects that I would like to raise with you. This is an observation

rather than a question. We have received many complaints over the years from citizens who lament the fact that their city is divided into two, three, and even four ridings. These are not cities with 100,000 inhabitants, but often cities with 15,000, 20,000, 30,000 or 40,000 inhabitants that are divided into several pieces. This means that local issues become problematic in terms of representation, in terms of who we can talk to, or who we can go to when we have problems. For local representation, even for elected representatives, this creates a lot of confusion.

I would simply like to say that I hope we will be sensitive to this, and that there will even be a directive from Elections Canada to try, as much as possible, to prevent communities from being cut into several pieces. In my riding, Boucherville has already been split in two, and I could also talk about Saint-Hubert, which was split in three in the last election. These are not very large cities.

I understand that you can't fit Montreal into a single riding, but I think there are many other places where you can do it while respecting the territory of cities and communities.

**The Chair:** Mr. Perrault, you have 40 seconds left to answer.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I'll keep it short.

I do not disagree, but I want to make it clear that we have no role in this and we never give instructions to the commissions. The commissions are chaired by a judge. We give them training tools, which includes the act. The criteria in the act recognize the importance of communities of interest, and that certainly includes respecting municipal boundaries. Once they are equipped with these tools, the commissions have complete independence in the exercise of their powers. I do not in any way instruct the commissions in their work, I simply equip them.

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

Ms. Blaney, you have the floor for six minutes.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP):** Thank you, Madam Chair, and of course as always through you, I would like to ask several questions.

First of all, I thank our witnesses for being here today.

My first question is around student participation. In the last election, there was no voting on campus. I heard a lot of frustration about that across my region and into other regions. When I looked at the notes, one thing I read is that it felt like there wasn't enough time because the fixed election wasn't there.

I'm just trying to get clarity. Does that mean campus voting will only be available during elections with fixed election dates? Is there no other way to start to prepare for opportunities when there may not be a fixed election date?

This just seems like a significant loss for young voters to be engaged.



• (1135)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I hope I can speak to it fully because it is an important issue. Campus kiosks are an initiative that we put forward because we believe it's an important one.

I just want to do a minor correction. There was voting on campuses, certainly for those who resided there, in some locations. There were returning offices near most campuses, if not on the campus and many times within the perimeter of the campus. There were not the special ballot campus kiosks that we offered for the first time on a national scale in 2019. I do wish to offer that in the future.

The context of this election was somewhat unique. When we began planning for it, essentially in the summer of 2020 in the pandemic, campuses were closed. There was no option of working with post-secondary institutions to set up arrangements for locations. They were not in that mindset, nor was anybody else. As we evolved in the pandemic and as we got into the summer prior to the election, there was talk about opening campuses. It was only then, in June, that we began looking at ways to do that.

Certainly right now we're in a different situation. We will start communications with campuses very shortly to try to settle in advance on agreements for locations to hold campus kiosks, even if it's a snap election. My goal for the fall, if there is a fall election, would be to have campus voting with special kiosks.

I do emphasize the fact that it has proven to be difficult in the past to obtain arrangements. It's easy to get commitments and agreements in principle from universities. It's much more difficult to negotiate the lease arrangements and the legal parameters of the arrangements so that we can have an agreement. It's even harder if we don't know when that vote will take place.

We will do our best efforts and it's certainly my commitment that we move toward having campus kiosks in any election. I do want to manage expectations. It is possible that we will face difficulties in a minority context.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I really appreciate the witness's answer.

Another question is specifically around rural and remote communities. I didn't see a lot of information in the report that addressed that specifically. As a member of Parliament, I represents a larger riding in British Columbia with a lot of small communities in some very remote locations. Some locations take more than just a ferry to get there.

Could you talk about what challenges were seen in those communities? I've heard anecdotally in my region that a lot of the people who usually work on elections were older, were concerned about COVID and didn't feel safe doing the work that they were either paid or volunteered to do. I expect that if I was hearing that in my riding, Madam Chair, they must have been hearing that in other parts of the country.

Could I hear about the challenges that rural and remote communities are facing and what actions, Madam Chair, the witness is taking to address those very challenges?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you.

It's a very important question, and I hope I can do it justice.

There has been a growing gap in the service offering between what Canadians in rural Canada and the remote parts of the country receive and what we're seeing in urban Canada. If you go back 20 years to the 37th general election in 2000, 3.5% of the voters voted at advance polls. In the last election, it was 35%. They voted over two days then, and now there are four days. That evolution is an evolution that's very urban. It's what we see in Toronto, and it's what we see in the suburbs across the country, but the service offering has not improved in remote parts of the country.

I would say that the main challenge has been a mix of legal and operational issues. The recruitment you mentioned is a challenge in those remote parts of the country. We asked for amendments to the act, which we did receive, that now allow me, by exception, to permit single days or two days of advance vote in parts of the country where the population and the workforce does not allow for four full days. Rather than it being all or nothing, zero days or four days of advance polls, it can be one or two days.

What we need to do is stop using those new provisions in a reactive way, as we've done in the last two elections, and start planning more aggressively for single or dual days of advance polls in those remote parts of the country.

That does directly impact first nations communities, so when we look at services to first nations communities, having planned days of advance vote, even if it's just one day, rather than waiting for a request and plan for zero or four, I think can make a big difference. That is what we are currently working to roll out for the next election. I think that will be a significant improvement.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We will now enter into round two.

Mr. Barrett, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Michael Barrett (Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, CPC):** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank Mr. Perrault and Mr. Roussel for being here today and thank Mr. Perrault for taking the time to meet with me, as a member of this committee, earlier in this session.

Through you, Madam Chair, to the witnesses, I'd like to discuss instances of foreign interference in this last election. There was a lot of reporting in Global News, and the Toronto Star about various instances in ridings in Ontario like Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill or in British Columbia like Steveston—Richmond East, where there were reports of an anonymous misinformation campaign using social media channels like WeChat.

Global News reported in one of their articles that CSIS had said that the intelligence community didn't detect foreign interference threats that rose to the level of jeopardizing Canada's ability to hold a "free and fair election", and that they didn't warrant warning the public, but that they were "aware of and remained vigilant of these activities".

My question, Madam Chair, to the witnesses is if they're aware of instances, if they can quantify them, and if there was an increase between the 2019 and 2021 elections of instances of foreign interference.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll try to answer this question the best I can.

We work, as you probably know, with the security and intelligence community at the federal level as well as with the provincial police to secure the election. This is a responsibility that is shared by several agencies and institutions, and we each have a different role to play.

What I can say first is that there have been no cyber-breaches of our electoral systems' IT infrastructure in this election.

There has been a fair amount of misinformation and disinformation about the electoral process, including misinformation about COVID measures at the polls. This is an area of focus for my agency, and we do monitor social media in that respect, and we have responded, corrected and pushed out correct information so that we can ensure that voters have all the right information about the voting process.

I am aware of the reports that you've mentioned regarding possible foreign interference through organic content, whether social media or foreign language media at the local level. Obviously this is a matter of concern to the sovereignty of our elections.

With respect to the application of the Elections Act, this is not something that involves any of the rules in the act. It is something that is of interest, no doubt, to our intelligence community and to Global Affairs in terms of the relationship with foreign entities, but I am not aware of instances of foreign interference that would involve breaches of the Canada Elections Act.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Okay.

Madam Chair, I thank the witness for the response. I see that I have about a minute left.

I'll just take a moment to put a motion on notice and provide that to members of the committee. That's being sent to the clerk now, and I have paper copies in both official languages for the clerk to distribute in the room.

This notice of motion for consideration at a future meeting is:

That the Committee, pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), conduct a study concerning foreign interference in Canadian elections, provided that: (a) the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections be invited to appear jointly for two hours at a televised meeting at their earliest opportunity; (b) the Chief of the Communications Security Establishment and the Director of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service be invited to appear jointly for two hours, at their earliest opportunities, provided that one hour be televised and the other hour be in camera; and (c) the parties represented on the Committee submit their lists of proposed witnesses, in order of priority.

With that, Madam Chair, I think I've exhausted my time.

Through you, Chair, to the witnesses, thanks very much for attending today and for taking the time to answer our questions.

● (1145)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that notice of motion, Mr. Barrett.

Mr. Perrault, do you want to make a quick comment?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** No, I think I'll leave it at that.

**The Chair:** Brilliant. Thank you so much.

Now, we will move on to Mr. Fergus for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

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

I would like to thank the witnesses who are here with us.

Mr. Perrault and Mr. Roussel, the work that you and your colleagues do at Elections Canada is remarkable and excellent. As my colleague Mr. Barsalou-Duval said, you have provided excellent service despite the situation.

Madam Chair, if I forget to mention it in every question, please consider that every question goes through you.

I would like to ask Mr. Perrault a question about mail-in voting. I found this exceptional. In the last election, I took advantage of this possibility for the first time in my life. I wanted to encourage voters to do the same, especially during the pandemic, when people were a bit worried about leaving the house.

What other tools do you think you need to better promote mail-in voting?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** You say you voted by mail and found it easy. I'm surprised at the poll results, which say that 97% of people found it easy. I was a bit surprised by that, because I think it's a cumbersome process. We've looked at this over the years, and I'm not sure if there are ways to make it less cumbersome. But we will certainly have to see whether it is possible to do so.

The main point that comes to mind at the moment is that voters who vote by special ballot have to vote for a candidate and not for a party. Given that the list of candidates is made official only 18 days before the election, this leaves relatively little time for voters to become familiar with the list. In the first period of the election, we promote mail-in ballots much less vigorously, because voters do not know the candidates, and we do not want to unduly favour incumbents. I am sorry to say that.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** That's a good thing.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** The information is there and we do some promotion, but not aggressively.

In the last election, 44% of the packages were approved 18 days before the election, when nominations were completed. In the British Columbia provincial election, the figure was 68%. The main difference in British Columbia is that the voter can vote for a party. This allows for a much more aggressive promotion of the mail-in ballot early in the campaign, and it allows voters to cast their ballots earlier in the election period to ensure that these are returned.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify something that seems to have caused some confusion. The mail-in ballot for constituents who vote in their own riding does not go through Ottawa, except for Ottawa voters, of course.

• (1150)

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Yes, it is sent directly to the returning officer.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** That's right.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** Excuse me, Mr. Perrault, but time is running out.

Madam Chair, I guess I have two minutes left.

**The Chair:** You have one minute left.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** So quickly, Mr. Perrault, I agree with you that the vote should be held on the weekend to encourage people to vote and to give you more opportunities to welcome voters.

Can you comment on that?

Do you still want voting to take place on Saturday and Sunday?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** This is a recommendation that I consider including in my report. We also need to be aware that holding two voting days is a challenge for rural and remote areas. Once again, these are excellent solutions in urban areas, but it is perhaps more difficult in more remote regions. So we have to look at all of this and see if we can be more flexible.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** So what can we do for remote areas?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** In cases where this is not possible because there is a very small population, it would be a matter of holding a single day of voting. However, for the weekend, this raises other questions. I'm thinking about that right now.

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

**The Chair:** Okay.

This is a very good example of why I do not want members and witnesses to speak to each other directly, but rather through the Chair. This makes the work of the interpreters difficult. That is why I ask you to address your comments to the Chair. When two people speak at the same time, it is no longer a conversation. It is not right. Our country has two official languages, so it is very important that the interpreters can do their job.

This being said—

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** On a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Yes, Mr. Fergus.

**Hon. Greg Fergus:** I suggest that we go in camera when we're talking about committee business. Perhaps we should extend the rounds, because it is difficult to have a conversation with our witnesses in six minutes.

**The Chair:** I know there have not been many occasions when members have been able to use all the time allocated to them, because you want to have exchanges with as much information as possible. Having said that, yes, we can always have this discussion in camera.

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

**The Chair:** Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Perrault, I would like to tell you about some situations that happened in my constituency, and certainly elsewhere.

For example, in a long-term care centre in Contrecoeur, in my constituency, there was no mobile poll. So people in the centre were not able to vote at all.

I could also talk about advance polling. It occurs before mobile polls come to long-term care centres. So, if the polling station is not very far from a centre or a retirement home, people will all rush to the advance poll, crowd into the location and have to wait for a very long time.

Can you suggest any solutions to solve the two situations I've just described to you? After all, the objective is for everyone to be able to vote.

I know that you won't have a lot of time to answer, but I could finish by telling you about another situation. People had to wait a huge amount of time to vote in Laurier—Sainte-Marie in the last election. I saw the same thing in my constituency, in Varennes. People chose to go back home after waiting for three hours at the polling station. Some said that it was because only one person was at the table, not two. In some cases, the decision was even made to not follow the instruction to have one person only. In order to clear the backlog in the polling station, they had two people anyway.

Certainly, it's a specific result of having an election during the pandemic. But the fact remains that it is important to make sure that people have the opportunity to vote, and I feel that there were problems with that.

**The Chair:** You have the floor, Mr. Perrault.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Of course, I share those concerns.

With the people in long-term care centres or retirement homes, the act was amended in order to provide greater flexibility. For the first time, various options were allowed. Each long-term care centre and each retirement home could work with the returning officer to decide on the method.

Traditional voting, not mobile polls, was provided in 77% of our long-term care centres and retirement homes. Then, they were assigned a day between the start of advance polling and election day. The vast majority of them voted before election day. Then, 19% voted by special ballot, with assistance, and, unfortunately, 4% of those who voted by special ballot did so without assistance. I know that the last option is much more complex for an elderly person. I wanted to eliminate it completely, but that was not possible because of the circumstances of the pandemic.

I know that does not address the case in the residence in your constituency. But I will point out, however, that, overall, voting by those in retirement homes dropped very little, certainly less than the overall vote. We saw a drop of 2%. In the grand scheme, I feel that we can be very satisfied with the accommodations we made.

The question is whether we will be able to maintain that flexibility. The act does not normally permit it, but perhaps this is one area where we should continue to provide greater flexibility.

As for the wait times, I can only indicate that they varied a great deal. The average was 13 minutes. That average in no way reflects the experience of voters who waited several hours in some cases, as I am aware. I am very aware of what happened in the constituency of Laurier—Sainte-Marie, as it did in Toronto. There were exceptional cases across the country and they varied a lot. In general, things went well, although not every voter may think so.

We used a one-worker model. In itself, the model does not slow the process down. We can even speed it up by having more tables. However, that depends on the set-up of the location. A number of variables have to be considered and, for the future, we have to look at what the best combination may be. When there is plenty of space for voting booths, we could also increase the number of tables, using one worker. Even though it may be a little slower per table, overall, things could balance out. So there are number of variables to consider.

However, I am very aware that not every Canadian had a good experience in the last election.

• (1155)

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

The floor now goes to Ms. Blaney.

[*English*]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madame Chair.

Through you, I would like to ask the witnesses a bit more about indigenous participation. In the write-up we have here, there is mention of the first nations electors in Kenora, Ontario, but I know that many indigenous communities had no way to vote, for example, first nations on reserve. It was not accessible.

I'm wondering if the committee could hear whether this was because of the pandemic, or whether there were other barriers, and what they were. What is the strategy, moving forward, to make sure those barriers are removed?

Another question I have is about the infrastructure limits, going back to both indigenous communities and rural and remote communities. I think of looking for spaces to set up. A place to hold elec-

tions can sometimes be challenging. Bella Coola was mentioned in the report. I know there were particular challenges there, but I imagine those are also experienced in smaller communities.

Further to that question, with the idea of having advance polls a bit more flexible, I want to make sure that process is happening. Is there anything this committee needs to recommend that would help that process be cleaner and smoother for rural and remote communities, and also for indigenous communities across the country?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Certainly, we have the tools to make advance polls more available. That is something that is happening right now, so we are working on this.

Stepping back and talking about first nations communities across Canada, this is an area where we need to improve, as I said in my report and in my remarks. The service offering to first nations communities did not, generally speaking, go down in this election. The problem is the growing delta between the service offering to those communities and the rest of Canadians. That delta is quite visible to those communities and it is something that needs to be addressed.

Every election, returning officers contact first nations communities in their electoral district. They contact 100% of them. They reach out to them prior to the election. In this case, they did that in June and July, and they reached out to all the communities once the writ was issued.

In a significant number of cases—57% this time around—first nations communities said they wanted to have polling services in their community. In roughly 40% of the cases, election after election, leaders in the communities have a decision to make and they decided that they do not wish to have voting services in the community. That's something we have always respected and will always respect. Of course, there's a long history behind that choice.

In many cases, the service offering is right outside of the community, just outside of the reserve. Some of these reserves are close to urban areas, and that works well. In other cases, it works not so well if there's a greater distance.

Each case is unique. In that regard, this election was not very different than other elections.

As I said, how we need to improve first is to increase the number of advance polling opportunities, so that first nations have the same or similar flexibility that most Canadians have. Currently, that is not the case. This is something we can do fairly quickly.

Longer term, we need to look back. We're in the process right now of building a team, which will include persons from first nations communities, to look at the way we engage with and communicate with first nations communities. How do we understand their realities and their needs? How do we better build bridges between those communities and Elections Canada to ensure that the service offering is adequate and that it's well communicated?

When we look back at Kenora, there were communications problems, there were problems with understanding the needs of the community and there were problems in terms of the service offering at advance polls. These are problems that are widespread. It will take more time. We are building a team to examine in depth how we engage with and communicate with first nations, but we don't need to wait years to start taking action. There are things we are putting in place right now to improve services.

● (1200)

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

Now I'll give the floor to Mr. Vis for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, Madam Chair, I'd like to pose two questions during my time today.

On page 34 of the report, it specifically references my riding. It states that:

Electors who were evacuated from Lytton, British Columbia, could vote in person at polls in Spence's Ridge (the closest community) or by mail or at a local Elections Canada office if they had self-evacuated farther away.

This was very problematic in my riding. Elections Canada was asking voters to go into an area that was under the imminent threat of a forest fire. It was not safe for people to be travelling to Spences Bridge.

Madam Chair, I am very concerned that Elections Canada didn't treat this issue with more seriousness and offer an option to voters to have the type of service commonly given to seniors in assisted living facilities, such as a mobile poll. This was also problematic, because many of my constituents and the voters had lost their identification. They had fled town with 15 minutes' notice and did not have either their vehicles or sufficient identification to vote by mail or to even go back into an area under an evacuation alert, as I recall.

Madam Chair, my second question relates to the issuing of leases. Throughout the report presented to us, it states clearly that with the snap election, it was difficult for Elections Canada officials to find adequate places to hold the election in conjunction with the pandemic and the snap election. It says that issuing leases, as well, can only be issued after the writ has dropped.

Madam Chair, would it be easier for Elections Canada to find suitable places for polling locations if they were able to issue leases before the writ drops?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, I'll start with the last question.

The problem is not the lack of ability to sign a lease before writ drops. It's because without knowing the date of the election, it is

not possible to secure premises for any date. In a fixed-date election context, we have the ability to enter into formal agreements much earlier than when the writs are dropped. It's not the case, of course, in a snap election, so there's unfortunately not much that can be done legally to assist us in that regard.

In the case of Lytton, I understand that it was an extremely difficult situation. I think it was difficult in many places in your district, both during and after the election with the floods.

One of the challenges there, if I understand correctly—and I'll ask my colleague Mr. Roussel to add to my comments—was that this was a place where people were not evacuated to a particular location, as is sometimes the case.

We've seen that in Winnipeg, for example, where we knew exactly where the evacuees were, and we were able to go there and serve them. It was more challenging in Lytton because—

● (1205)

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I'll just intervene on that point. The majority of the evacuees were evacuated to Kamloops and Merritt in the adjacent electoral district. That is why, during the election, I specifically requested a mobile polling station. I'm still at a loss as to why Elections Canada couldn't have been flexible to have that option for the voters, many of whom—I might add—were indigenous from Lytton First Nation.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you for putting that on the record, Mr. Vis. There are about 50 seconds remaining.

We go to Mr. Perrault and then to Mr. Roussel.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Perhaps, Monsieur Roussel, you could add some elements of information here about the situation in Lytton.

Normally we do try to make use of the flexibility we have.

**Mr. Michel Roussel (Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events and Innovation, Elections Canada):** Unfortunately, Madam Chair, I will have to study that case and get more information on what the member has been recounting. We want to get the facts straight.

**The Chair:** That would be great.

Mr. Vis has put some comments on the record. He is available.

We would welcome that information to the committee members.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, Madam Chair, I'd like to request a written response regarding my line of questioning today on the situation—

**The Chair:** I did say that.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** —with Lytton specifically.

Okay, good.

**The Chair:** Perfect.

Thank you all very much.

Now, Ms. Romanado, you have five minutes.

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

Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

I have a question with respect to voter information cards. In the report provided to the committee, the issue of voter information cards, VICs, was highlighted on the bottom of page 16 and on the top of page 17, where there was a delay in mailing them out because of the fact that Elections Canada did have difficulty securing polling places.

I know for a fact that many constituents in my riding were not aware of the fact that they could still vote even though they hadn't received the voter information card, despite our efforts to educate them that they didn't need it to vote. That was an issue we heard a lot about.

Also, with respect to advance polling and special ballots, people are still assuming that they have to have a rationale or a reason to use those other options, whether they be the special ballot or advance polls. They're under the impression that they have to a valid excuse not to vote on election day.

Through you, Madam Chair, could the Chief Electoral Officer explain some of the education efforts to ensure that voters, especially new citizens to Canada, know what they can and cannot do?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** It is quite correct that of course the voter information is not required. We encourage electors to bring it because it does facilitate the process.

We have an information campaign that informs electors of all the various options for voting. We have material in 49 languages, and I can certainly follow up with the committee on the measures we take to inform new Canadians, because we do have measures in place. It is unfortunate that some are still under the impression that they cannot vote without a voter information card. Clearly that is not the case.

Similarly, I have to say that I am somewhat surprised that electors still believe you need an excuse or reason to vote at advance polls. It's been many years, and as I said earlier, we've gone from 3.5% to 35%. Quite frankly, if we continue in that direction—and there's no sense of it stopping—we will need longer election periods because recruitment is becoming extremely difficult in the days leading up to the advance polls. We can't have half of the population voting at advance polls and train half of the poll workers in the amount of time we have now.

I'm not sure how to respond to that. I can certainly share with the committee the products we use and the approach we take to explain to voters how they need to prepare to vote at the election.

• (1210)

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** I also wanted to touch briefly on recruiting people to work at the polls. I know that in my riding it was an issue. We had a lot of difficulty recruiting people to work at the polls. We had situations—and I know you referred to this in the re-

port—where some employees would not show up or would quit on the day of the advance poll and it caused a bit of havoc.

What efforts are there to try to recruit and train people to work during the elections? Is some online training available in between elections? If you could, please elaborate a bit on that, because we saw a lot of people who had never worked at elections before working this time, and it slowed down the process and there were a lot of errors. I know that in terms of closing polls, people had difficulty counting ballots. If you could elaborate, that would be great.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** In the context of the pandemic, the challenge is not just recruiting but also training, because when we train in person in closed classrooms, with the distancing that's required, you need more space, more classrooms. One of the things we did in this election was augment the tools for training using new online material and online training sessions. I don't believe they're available as we speak, but we could make them available all the time. We also had “train on your own” guides to support poll workers. However, clearly there were new poll workers in this election, and perhaps more than other elections because of the unique circumstances.

I'll add that in this election, 14,000 poll workers who had been recruited and trained did not show up on polling day. In the last election, it was 10,000. I'm happy to say that we managed this much better than 10,000. Because it did cause a disruption in the last election, we were prepared for it. We expected that people would, at the last minute, be sick—and we asked people who were sick not to show up—or be concerned about COVID, or for other reasons decide not to show up. There were 14,000 who did not show up.

Returning officers made calls in the days leading up to the election to firm up the commitments, and when people said they were no longer willing to work, they had to merge polls. Basically, it causes a lot of lineups—around Toronto in particular, for example—when you need to combine polls. There's a limit, of course, to how much combining one can do without creating significant lineups. That was a big challenge for us in this election.

We'll need to revisit that. I'm not sure there's any magic wand we can wave. I don't know anybody who can recruit more than 195,000 people in 30 days and train them for a single day of work. It's quite a challenge.

**Mrs. Sherry Romanado:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Now we will enter the third round, starting with Mr. Melillo. Welcome back to PROC.

Mr. Melillo, go ahead, for five minutes.

**Mr. Eric Melillo (Kenora, CPC):** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to be back at the committee.

Mr. Perrault, I appreciate your taking the time to speak to the committee today.

I represent the riding of Kenora, which of course as you know had a number of issues throughout the course of the election. Before I get to my questions, I want to put a bit of context on the record from my experience, particularly in the far north in the first nations communities that you mentioned earlier on.

The returning officer in our riding actually reached out to all of our campaigns. It was clear to every single campaign that the election day in some of the communities was essentially going to be moved. In Pikangikum specifically this was the case. It was to accommodate a traditional harvesting day that coincided with the election. That was clearly communicated to the campaigns—I can tell you that.

I was quite shocked to see in the days after the election that the community itself was not aware of that. I had a call from the chief of Pikangikum, who told me that there was never any communication to him that that was going to be the case.

In another instance, in Northwest Angle, prior to election day the chief reached out to me to ask where her polling station was. When I went to the Elections Canada website I found out that she was actually listed as the contact for the polling location. Again, there was clearly a breakdown of communication, to put it mildly.

It wasn't just in the first nations, actually. There were many other concerns as well.

Red Lake is another example, where the advance polling station that was advertised online and communicated to the campaigns was actually not where the polling station was. I just found that out because I happened to be driving by. I stopped by because there were no cars in the parking lot, and it looked like there was no one there, and there wasn't. The polling station was not at that location.

In trying to spread some news about that, I shared the information on Facebook and was actually flagged for spreading misinformation, which of course was untrue, by Elections Canada. It was actually Elections Canada that was incorrect.

I know there was a lot to take in there. There were clearly some widespread systemic, structural issues that go far beyond just one or two communities.

My questions to you are through the chair. How do we explain that? Is it a function of the snap election, a pandemic election, of a shorter writ period? How can that happen in a general election in Canada?

• (1215)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I share your shock and anger. If you were flagged for misinformation that's because we were not informed of those changes. I was not aware that the polling day had been cancelled. While you had

been informed of the change in Pikangikum, we were not. So, when you say there were—

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Madam Chair, can I ask who is then responsible for that decision, if you were not aware? That sounds like something you should be aware of.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** It certainly is something that I should be aware of. The cancellation of a polling day, on polling day, is extraordinary. It's something that needs to be communicated to headquarters. I need to know, and we need to be able to take measures to inform voters through all kinds of means. Clearly, that did not take place in Kenora.

You raise a number of circumstances. I'm not sure I'm aware of all of those circumstances, but I recognize there was a breakdown in communication, and that was problematic.

Not all of that can be explained by COVID or the circumstances of this election. The returning officer has moved on. He's retired. We will be recruiting. Certainly communications with local communities will rank very high on the priorities of the returning officer, and of course communications with headquarters will be emphasized as well.

**Mr. Eric Melillo:** Thank you.

One more question is all I have time for, Madam Chair.

I'd just like to ask if you can share a bit of information on what concrete steps you are going to take to ensure that this never happens again in Kenora, or in any electoral district across the country?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I have already mentioned one. I think it's maybe the most important one. A lot of the confusion that took place was the result of shifting days of voting because there had not been planned advance polls. Had there been at least one day of advance polls in Pikangikum, or Poplar Hill or Cat Lake, the leaders there would not have had to call a returning officer and indicate that September 20 was a problem. They would have been satisfied with the existence of an alternative. The lack of an alternative polling day was at the root cause of the confusion and the error of cancelling a polling day in those communities.

I think that is the most important aspect, and it reaches well beyond, as I've said before, Kenora. That is something we need to expand across Canada in remote and rural areas.

I think, beyond that, the issues of communications are more local. We need to reinforce, of course, the mechanisms and the importance of communicating both at headquarters and with the communities.

I also mentioned that we're putting together a team who will look into how we engage with, communicate with and understand first nations communities. We will have members of first nations communities involved in that team. I certainly hope we will have the opportunity to work closely with the communities in Kenora as part of that initiative, to see how we can improve the services in the long term.

• (1220)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Perrault, whose responsibility would it be to inform you of such a change?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** If a poll is cancelled on polling day, I expect the returning officer to communicate with headquarters about the cancellation so that we could put in place communications for the electors in that community.

**The Chair:** So the returning officer would be calling central not calling you directly?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Correct.

**The Chair:** Thank you for that information.

Mr. Gerretsen, you have five minutes.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, my questions are for Mr. Perrault and are on the topic of election financing.

There are reports that there is a lot of money that's currently being raised by the protests and blockades that are going on in Canada right now that is coming in from foreign sources. One leaked document from one of the fundraising organizations suggests that as much as 61% of money is coming from foreign sources.

If the organizers of those protests or blockades were to turn around and use that money for leadership campaigns, or towards election campaigns, would that be considered illegal?

**The Chair:** Through the chair.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, Madam Chair, there are existing provisions in the act that quite clearly say that foreign funds cannot be used for regulated activities, including partisan activities, and that would include leadership races. There is a prohibition in the legislation.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you.

Sorry, and I did say through the chair at the beginning so this is all through the chair.

What is being done to ensure that happens, through the chair?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, let me answer in a twofold way.

First of all, the commissioner is the one whose responsible for looking into enforcement of the act. The facts are, of course, extremely important, and whether there are actual funds that are being transferred, and that are, in fact, being used for partisan activities are all matters of fact that need to be looked into. I cannot speak to that, but it doesn't flow necessarily from the fact that some funds have been raised and there may be some partisan activity that there's a connection.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Now—

**The Chair:** I'm going to pause the clock for a second.

Mr. Perrault, there is a procedure where the amount of time that the questioner poses is about the time that you would take to answer.

I will provide leniency, Mr. Gerretsen, when the answers are too long if they do provide substance so please rest assured that you will get your answers.

Mr. Gerretsen.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you.

By my count, I have three minutes left.

Through you, Madam Chair, what if the money that was raised was utilized by a third party? For example, there are a number of banners that are being erected around the Wellington Street area on the back of trucks that say Pierre Poilievre for Prime Minister.

If fundraising dollars through fundraising efforts that were coming in from the United States and other parts of the world, which were then being used by a third party to create such banners, would that be considered illegal?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** There are prohibitions on using foreign funds for partisan activities, and that applies even outside of the electoral campaign.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** That applies equally to the direct campaign as it would a third party.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I'm not sure I understand the question.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Can a third party take money that's been fundraised from outside of the country and use it for political purposes to influence political purposes and to influence election campaigns, leadership campaigns, within the country?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I'll try to be brief. In a direct way, the answer is no, they cannot do that.

The difficulty, as I indicated when I testified on Bill C-76, is that although we have prohibitions, it's difficult to trace the source of funds for third parties. Third parties use funds that come from organizations that may come from other organizations, and so forth.

There is not a disclosure of the original sources going back to individual donors being Canadian citizens or permanent residents, as there is for parties and candidates. Doing that raises difficult issues from a charter point of view.

This is something that I'm looking into. I will be making recommendations to Parliament sometime in April. I intend to address and propose some avenues—

• (1225)

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Perfect. That's what I was going to get at. I was going to ask if some recommendations would be forthcoming with respect to how something like that could be handled.

I have 30 seconds left. If one were so inclined to open an investigation into this, how would that happen?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** It starts with a complaint to the Commissioner of Canada Elections referencing facts that relate to a particular offence under the act. That is the way forward for that.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

[Translation]

The floor is yours, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** Thank you, Madam Chair.



I would like Mr. Perrault to explain to us how the feedback between the constituency returning officer and Elections Canada works, as well as the feedback between Elections Canada and the various candidates. How can they be assured that people were satisfied with how the election went locally?

I ask, because I have witnessed some situations that keep happening, one election after another. I wonder why they have not been corrected.

For example, in the elections in 2015, 2019 and 2021, residents in one village complained that they had to go to a neighbouring village to vote although their own village already had a polling station. The same situation happened in towns. Contrecoeur is a town of 10,000 people, but some had to go and vote in a village of 1,000 people, 30 or 40 minutes drive away.

Those situations have been pointed out to Elections Canada and to the returning officer for at least three elections, but they keep happening. For example, people living two minutes walk from a polling station have to drive 10 minutes to somewhere further away in order to vote. It is frustrating for them, because they go to the polling station, just to be told that they can't vote there. They're frustrated, and they often end up not voting.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, we are very aware of the problem. We worked on it a great deal as we prepared for the 2019 election. Then we had the advantage of having an election on a fixed date, and no pandemic.

When we plan polling stations, our systems allow us to ensure that, to the extent possible, voters are not asked to walk or drive past a polling station in order to get to another polling station further away. That is extremely frustrating. We have the technology that lets us examine how close polling stations are, not only with a bird's eye view, but also according to the routes that voters take. So I expect that there were many fewer cases in 2019 than in the past.

As for 2021, it was a little more complicated because we also had to deal with the issue of managing the volume. It is possible that the closest location was completely full, and the returning officer had no other choice but to assign some voters to other locations. For an election with no fixed date, it all has to be done much more quickly, and it's much more complex.

I am not surprised that there could have been more cases this time, but I can tell you that we have the tools to reduce the number of those cases. We have the time to look at things more closely.

If you have specific cases to tell us about, my team and I will be happy to look into them.

My apologies, Madam Chair. I should have directed that last comment through you.

**The Chair:** Sure. Thank you very much. I think that all members know that they can deal with your office.

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

The floor now goes to Ms. Blaney.

[English]

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was really impacted by the questions posed by Mr. Vis. I had an opportunity to drive through parts of his riding during the forest fires, and the impact that it had on that area was quite shocking.

That leads me to the question I would like to ask.

Is Elections Canada actually starting to explore how to adapt to the impacts of climate change? We have seen in B.C., in particular, some significant rain that caused huge flooding, isolating many of our communities. We saw forest fires destabilizing communities. If I had 15 minutes to save my life, I certainly wouldn't be thinking that I must remember to bring my licence, so that I could go and vote.

With these changes happening, and we're seeing them, is Elections Canada actually putting any research and work into looking at how we can make sure that, regardless of what happens, people continue to have their right to vote in these most extreme situations? This can happen anywhere, and can shut down different parts of our country. How do we prepare to respond to that?

• (1230)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** It is certainly something that struck us, not during this election but the prior election, when there were many storms around Winnipeg, in particular, but also out east. People were flown in from the headquarters in Ottawa to serve...hydro workers who were helping out with the power outages in Winnipeg. We realized then that the model we had to serve those hydro workers...We had to have something called an election in the box, where we plan for the possibility of having to deploy resources, and adjust to an election.

Is it a complete failproof system? Absolutely not. We are certainly aware of this. We need to learn from those experiences before every election.

One of the challenges that you point out, and has been pointed out by other members before, is the ID rule. Should we be able to relax border ID rules in the case of electors who are displaced, and may not have all of the ID requirements with them? We have not done that so far. Perhaps that's something I need to consider. I have not received evidence of that being a problem, but that may not be true in the sense that there may actually have been problems.

We'll need to look into that particular aspect, but we do have some planning and contingencies. We have teams who monitor weather events during elections, and prepare to adjust the service offerings as we look into extreme weather events.

**The Chair:** Ms. Blaney, you're always really good with time, and I know we won't start a new round.

Is there another comment or question that you wanted to get in?

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** Thank you, Madam Chair, I really appreciate that.

I have a quick question about special ballots, the mail-in ballots. I'm wondering how the return rate for 2021 was compared to previous elections. My riding was number five in the top 10, with many folks from B.C., as you can see in the graphs we got.

How strong was that return rate?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** There is a return rate, and there is a late return rate. These are two separate questions. Some were not returned, and some were returned but received late. We have a table in the report, table 4, that compares with the last election, and there is a significant variation. Overall, the late ballots in the 43rd election were 1.5%, compared to 7.1% in this election. It's quite an increase.

Certainly, one factor is the duration of the election. It was four days longer. As I indicated earlier, there are other elements at play that we can possibly work on to reduce those late ballots.

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

We will now go to Mr. Vis, for five minutes.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Following up on Ms. Blaney's questions about climate change, perhaps it would be prudent, Madam Chair, if Elections Canada reported back to this committee, and explained more in regard to a natural disasters framework. I don't believe this will be the last time these types of events will take place in my riding, or in many other places across Canada.

Madam Chair, would Elections Canada be open to providing that to this committee?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, I certainly can. I'd be happy to testify to it or simply provide that in writing.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you.

Madam Chair, the report noted that there was a delay in issuing voter information cards. In some contexts, they were arriving the week of the election.

Madam Chair, does Elections Canada believe that voter participation would have been higher had the VICs been received in mailboxes across Canada at an earlier date? As the report mentions, VICs are a key way to both inform and educate Canadians on their right to vote and the time and place to do so.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

• (1235)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, obviously the lateness of the voter information cards is not something that we wished for. I think it's important to have them early, but they are dependent on the ability to confirm a poll. Without those polls, they were delayed by one week.

It's very difficult to establish causation in terms of voter participation. A survey from StatCan was released today or yesterday. It shows some of the reasons for not voting. They're very similar to what we've seen in previous elections.

I don't have any data that would support that, but it doesn't mean that it's not important to have those cards in as early as possible.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

The report noted that approximately 11.3% of voters were not registered or 88.7% of electors were registered. Of the 11.3% not registered, does Elections Canada know why they were not registered, and why the number was marginally lower for registered voters this election?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Certainly, the overall coverage at 96% of the last election is around a historic high. It has not varied much. Clearly in the context of the pandemic, there were limits on revision activities. More was done through communications with voters and asking them to go online. Overall, the numbers, in terms of coverage at 96% and accuracy at over 92%, are very close to the historic high of the last election.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Through you, Madam Chair, would Elections Canada be able to clarify what they mean by "revision activities"?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Certainly.

There are a range of activities that take place during the writ period, both in person and through communications. In person, for example, we would typically go to long-term care facilities, student areas or places where there are new buildings and go door to door to make sure that we adjust the National Register of Electors. These activities did not take place in the context of the pandemic.

We used other means of communications to update the register.

**Mr. Brad Vis:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chair, how much time do I have remaining?

**The Chair:** You have about a minute, but if you have a question that you're pointing to—

**Mr. Brad Vis:** I'll get a quick question in.

Following on Mr. Gerretsen's comments about foreign interference, the election report noted that there was increased scrutiny on the part of Elections Canada related to social media. It came to my attention during the election that, in some cases, paid social media platforms were used to promote certain candidates. In some cases, those paid social media platforms were not based in Canada, nor were they owned or operated by Canadians.

Is it appropriate, Madam Chair, for non-Canadian citizens to use social media platforms from another jurisdiction outside Canada to promote either a candidate or a political party during an election?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, I think it's important to emphasize that it is important for Canadians, and only Canadians, to be paying for regulated activities. That is what the act requires.

It does not prevent Canadians from using platforms that may be situated elsewhere. If any member has information regarding individuals outside Canada who incurred regulated expenses in relation to the election, I encourage anyone to bring that information forward to me or the commissioner.

• (1240)

**The Chair:** Thank you for that exchange.

Now we will have our final questioner for our time together.

Mr. Turnbull.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thanks, Madam Chair.

Mr. Perrault, I understand that perhaps there have been some pay delays for some of the staff who worked the 44th general election. Could you tell us a little bit about how those pay delays are being resolved and whether they might possibly have any impact on people's desire to work for Elections Canada in future elections?

**The Chair:** That's through the chair.

Mr. Turnbull, perhaps you could make it a little bit easier for the last round.

Thank you.

Mr. Perrault, go ahead, please.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** There's excellent news and bad news in that regard.

Overall I think we're doing quite well. Ninety-eight per cent of workers were paid within four weeks. I think that is extremely good given the volumes we had.

The difficulty is with the remaining 2%. In every election there are problems with missing information or inaccurate bank account information, for example. The challenge arises when the returning officers close their office early and then do not have access to this information. It's locked up in sealed envelopes or boxes that are being shipped to headquarters and it's just not possible to access.

There's always a bit of work and it's really unfortunate for those who have given their time and who expect that money. So if there are still people out there, we do have a call centre to manage those situations and to make sure we deal with the exceptions. They truly are exceptions, and they are based on missing or incorrect information that prevent the processing of money.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** That sort of relates to my next question, Madam Chair. It's not on the same track in terms of employee pay or pay for workers but it is in terms of disinformation and misinformation.

Previously, Mr. Perrault, you spoke about things being mostly online, and I think this was in your response to Mr. Barrett's line of questioning earlier. Could you give some examples, from the monitoring, of what types of misinformation or disinformation were present online or were typical?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** There was quite a bit of content online, often not quite accurate. It might have had to do with the rules of voting, things like whether it was permissible to bring your pen rather than using a pencil. It might have had to do, in some cases, with the dates of voting. We saw a lot of misinformation regarding which COVID rules were applicable, some suggesting that you needed to be vaccinated in order to vote.

This is the kind of misinformation that we actively try to correct. We do push out proper information and we encourage all Canadians to turn to Elections Canada to find the correct information on ways to vote and how they can vote.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Perrault. I appreciate that.

Was it an attempt to throw people off in terms of whether it was safe to vote or they could actually vote? So, was it really to deter people from voting? Would that be fair to say?

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** I think it's very difficult to impute motivation when you see what's written online. There's a lot of confusion. There are conspiracy theories. Every election we get a fairly significant amount of conversation around pencils being used to erase votes. We've disproved those many times, but they live out there.

By the way, we get the same stories when we speak to colleagues in the U.K.—they call it “Pencilgate”. They're the same people who push the same information across borders and they'll find other ways in different countries.

It's not clear what the motivations are. If there were a case in which we clearly saw an attempt to mislead voters, there are offences in the act and we would refer the case to the commissioner. We focus more on getting the right information across than on looking at motivation.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

Through you, Madam Chair, this is my last question if I have time.

We've seen, over the last few weeks, the Conservative Party support a convoy of occupants in our capital city, a convoy that really has a stated intention of overthrowing a democratically elected government.

Do you have concerns about mainstream political parties supporting this type of anti-democratic rhetoric? How do you propose that we can protect our democratic institutions in the future against—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** On a point of order, Madam Chair, you mentioned previously to all members of the committee that they should be cautious about their choice of words and mindful that we invited folks to participate in a conversation with respect to the election laws in Canada. Your comments, Madam Chair, were made with a view to the ongoing debate that's happening in the House of Commons.

While Mr. Turnbull's comments seek to create a narrative indirectly that he would not be permitted to make directly, I just wonder if it is germane to the conversation at hand.

Obviously, Madam Chair, I reject the premise of the question—it's intentionally inflammatory. I think there's probably an opportunity to move on to constructive and on-topic questions for our guests.

• (1245)

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett, I appreciate your comments. I will just say that my comments earlier were to the tone and temperament I would like to establish for the PROC committee, so I will just maintain my focus on this committee and how we operate.

We know what the theme of today's committee meeting is, and I would remind members to stay on theme. I do believe that there might be a diversity of perspectives on whether this is or not, but it is Mr. Turnbull's time, and I would like us to be able to complete this round of questioning.

Mr. Turnbull, I'm sure you find your comments and questions relevant, and if not, I'm sure you will course-correct, always, and get to relevancy. Thank you.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and, through you, to Mr. Perrault.

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Madam Chair, as you're well aware, we neither oversee nor manage; whether it's protest or occupation, I will leave others to qualify what's happening right now. Our role is not to comment on or oversee what's happening. That is outside of the election.

I will note that 91% of Canadians trust the results of the election and the management of elections by Elections Canada. It's a very high number. I think it's important that this trust be maintained, as it is a guarantee of the peacefulness of the transition of powers or the making of powers, depending on the results of the election. That is something that is very important to our democracy. I will leave it at that.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

Maybe I can just concur with Mr. Perrault that I think protecting our democratic institutions is vitally important.

We've got some—

**The Chair:** We're getting feedback. I'm not sure—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I have a point of order, Madam Chair.

**The Chair:** I'm going to let Mr. Turnbull finish his comment, and I will come right to you, Mr. Barrett.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** It's a point of order, Madam Chair.

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

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** Madam Chair, based on the response the witness provided to Mr. Turnbull in questions, I'm going back to my previous point of order. That line of questioning created quite a bit of disorder in the room, which speaks to the issue that I had raised with you before.

**Mr. Mark Gerretsen:** It's not a point of order—

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I'm sorry. I'm being shouted down, Madam Chair. There's a great deal of disorder in the room.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett, I think you have made your point. I appreciate that.

**Mr. Michael Barrett:** I would just ask that the room be brought to order, Madam Chair.

Mr. Gerretsen and Mr. Turnbull are creating disorder.

**The Chair:** Mr. Barrett, thank you.

Mr. Turnbull, finish your comments, and we will be at time.

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I was just stressing the point that Mr. Perrault made, which is how important the trust in our democratic institutions is, and I certainly appreciate his hard work to protect one of our vital institutions. It's just too bad that we see political parties supporting anti-democratic rhetoric. That's something that I think flies in the face of the great work—

**The Chair:** Mr. Turnbull—

**Mr. Ryan Turnbull:** —that people like Mr. Perrault do every day.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

That brings us to the end of round three and almost to the end of our time here together.

Since we don't have time for another round, I am going to ask, Mr. Roussel, if you have any comments you would like to share.

I will give you one minute.

**Mr. Michel Roussel:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

I do not have comments to add. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We do look forward to your work that you will be providing us in writing for Mr. Vis, as well as other members who have made certain comments, so that we can have that information.

Mr. Perrault, would you like a two-minute closing, maybe, to summarize anything you have heard or would like to share?

• (1250)

**Mr. Stéphane Perrault:** Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Chair.

I'm not going to try to attempt to summarize. I always do my best to support the work of the committee and will be happy to provide additional information. If members want to speak to me bilaterally on an issue, I always welcome that as well.

I understand that the committee will be undertaking a range of studies in the future and I will be called to testify then. As I indicated, I do intend to make recommendations to Parliament later this spring, and I look forward to that opportunity as well.

**The Chair:** That's excellent. I really appreciate that offer when it comes to each of our ridings. We all have examples of things that took place, and we all want to see more people being able to exercise their democratic right.

I would just reiterate that point: that we should provide all insights we have to the Chief Electoral Officer and his team so we can ensure that we continue to better our systems.

With that, I would like to thank Mr. Perrault and Mr. Roussel on behalf of all committee members for joining us here today for a fruitful exchange, I would say, on quite a variety of topics. It definitely demonstrates the importance of you being here with us today, so we do appreciate your time and attention.

[*Translation*]

Please stay healthy and safe. We will continue to work together.

[*English*]

With that, PROC committee members, we have about eight minutes left. If we would like any other comments shared among members, please let me know now. Otherwise, with your permission, we can adjourn our meeting.

Is there anything from you, Mr. Duncan?

**Mr. Eric Duncan:** Have a wonderful afternoon, everybody.

[*Translation*]

**The Chair:** Do you have any comments, Mr. Barsalou-Duval?

**Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval:** I certainly would have liked to provide Mr. Perrault with other comments, but I will respect the assigned speaking times. My thanks to him for being here.

I very much liked being part of this meeting of the committee.

**The Chair:** That's great.

[*English*]

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** I am happy to second Mr. Duncan.

Thank you so much to the witnesses—

**Some hon. members:** —through the chair.

**Ms. Rachel Blaney:** —through the chair.

**The Chair:** I will end it there, because I think we are good to go.

Thank you, all. Have a good day. Keep well and safe.

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