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SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM

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Wednesday, September 14, 2022 — 6:00 p.m.

Chair: Kate White

**SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON ELECTORAL REFORM**

Members: Kate White, Chair
Brad Cathers, Vice-Chair
Hon. John Streicker

Clerk: Allison Lloyd, Clerk of Committees

Speakers: Ben Sanders
Vince Slotte
Dave Meslin

EVIDENCE**Carmacks, Yukon****Wednesday, September 14, 2022 — 6:00 p.m.**

Chair (Ms. White): I will now call to order this hearing of the Yukon Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Electoral Reform. I would like to begin by respectfully acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional territory of the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation. The Committee has been holding hearings in communities across Yukon, and this hearing, our final community hearing, is scheduled for 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. tonight. The Committee would like to remind Yukoners that they can also provide their input by e-mail or letter mail, or by using the comment form on HowYukonVotes.ca. The deadline for written submissions is September 30, 2022.

Allow me to introduce the members of the Committee: My name is Kate White, I am Chair of the Committee and Member of the Legislative Assembly for Takhini-Kopper King. Brad Cathers is Vice-Chair of the Committee and the Member for Lake Laberge; he is joining us by videoconference. Finally, the Hon. John Streicker is the Member for Mount Lorne-Southern Lakes.

This Committee was established by the Yukon Legislative Assembly on May 26, 2021. The Committee's purpose is to examine electoral reform and report to the Assembly its findings and recommendations. In our study of potential changes to the voting system, the Committee first sought to identify what options may be available. The Committee hired Dr. Keith Archer to prepare a report on electoral systems. Dr. Archer's full 76-page report and an executive summary are available on the Committee's webpage at yukonassembly.ca/SCER.

The information from Dr. Archer's report has been summarized on the website HowYukonVotes.ca. Summaries of some of the potential voting systems are included on a brochure that was sent to all Yukoners, and copies of that pamphlet are available here today.

To deepen its understanding of the topic, the Committee heard from subject matter experts, including Dr. Archer and academics from across Canada and around the world, through 14 videoconference hearings held between January and April of this year. Transcripts and recordings of the hearings are available on the Committee's webpage.

It is important to the Committee to know what Yukoners think about electoral reform. From February 15 to April 10, 2022, the Yukon Bureau of Statistics administered a public survey for the Committee. The Committee would like to thank the 6,129 Yukoners who completed that survey — that's 17.1 percent of Yukoners age 16 and older. A report on the results of the survey is available on the Committee's webpage.

We have not yet decided on our recommendations to the Legislative Assembly — the Committee is collecting opinions and ideas from Yukoners on electoral reform. The time allotted for this hearing will be devoted to hearing from Yukoners, and we will not be answering questions or presenting information on electoral reform today.

If you would like to present your opinion to the Committee, please ensure that you have registered at the registration table, and please note that this hearing is being recorded and transcribed — everything you say will be on the public record and posted on the Committee's website. If you are participating by Zoom, you can send a chat message to the Clerk to be added to the list of presenters, and if you need technical help with Zoom, please call 867-334-2448.

Individual presentations to the Committee will be limited to five minutes. If there is time remaining at the end of the presentations, presenters may be invited to speak longer.

I would like to welcome everyone in the audience and ask that you please respect the rules for this hearing. Visitors are not allowed to disrupt or interfere in the proceedings. Please mute any electronic devices, and refrain from making noise, including comments, during the presentations.

When you are called to speak, please come up to the microphone.

We're going to start with Mr. Ben Sanders, joining us via Zoom.

Mr. Sanders: Thank you, Kate. Can you hear me okay?

Chair: Yes, excellent.

Mr. Sanders: Perfect, okay. Thank you, I appreciate the opportunity to speak tonight. I was unable to attend the hearing in Whitehorse, and so I appreciate the opportunity to speak remotely. I'm calling from my home in Fish Lake, and though it may not be on the record, my son, Theo, in the background, you might hear his noise — apologies in advance.

I would like to start by saying thank you for having this conversation; thank you for the opportunity to be part of it, and for including Yukoners in the process of collaboration and consultation. I think that's really healthy in any democracy, and I think that's really vibrant and exciting to see that the Yukon is exploring this together.

There are two pieces that I'd like to speak on today: one is my thoughts around electoral reform and the mechanics of our voting system, and the other is specifically around the age at which people are eligible to vote. I'll start in that particular order.

I had the opportunity, many years ago, of running, or putting my name forward for nomination federally for the Yukon, and one of the pieces that I advanced at that time was the idea of changing our electoral system federally. I was excited, at the time, that that was a promise and a commitment that the government that became government was planning to explore and to try to solve. Unfortunately, they didn't, and I'm still sad that that hasn't happened, and I hope that we don't make the same mistake here in the Yukon, that if we're exploring this, and if it is the conclusion that the majority of Yukoners and the voices that you have heard are interested in moving forward with this process, that it happens, whatever the outcome may be from there.

At the time, I was a proponent of a ranked ballot, though I'm not advocating specifically for that here. I do believe, though, that the first-past-the-post system that we have here today prevents the electorate at large from being represented properly. I came today from Yellowknife, where I learned and

was excited to see, thought I don't believe they've adopted a different voting system, that they have a female premier. They have more women than men in Cabinet and in caucus, which, throughout their legislature, I think that's the first in Canada — more indigenous representatives as well, a majority of that, and that's really exciting to see.

I think that the first-past-the-post system is preventing us from seeing more of that. I'm excited to see today that Alaska has elected its first woman to Congress, who happens to also be an Alaskan native, and that's really exciting too. Why has it taken so long? I think first-past-the-post is part of the problem.

So, I'm really excited that you're exploring ranked ballots, proportional, and different options. I think it's interesting that many parties here territorially use a ranked ballot to elect their leaders. So, if we're already doing that internally in the parties here, why aren't we making that available more broadly for the electorate? Clearly, there's a rationale for it being worth it, and we should be exploring that as well.

I think we've been a leader, in the Yukon, when it comes to other things, like self-government agreements with the indigenous governments here, and many other things. I think it's inevitable that this change will happen, that we will make the voting system better. The Yukon has an opportunity to either follow, or to be a leader, and we're poised to be a lead on this right now, so thanks for exploring that.

On the second piece, lowering the voting age, I've been really excited to work with a number of youth in the Yukon throughout the summer who are really passionate about seeing this change, Yukoners who are 16 and 17 who believe that they should have a voice as well. We're already saying that they're old enough to drive, and old enough to pay taxes, so why aren't they able to help choose how those taxes are allocated and distributed?

I think actually the onus should be on the rest of us, for all the fallacies and problems that exist for those of us above 18, to come up with a better answer as to why 16 and 17-year olds shouldn't vote. I'll put forward a few that I think are reasonable. My own experience, when I went away for university, after 18, through 21, it was a terrible time to try to figure out how to vote for the first time, remotely and away from my home. There are all sorts of challenges fraught with that experience. I think there are studies that show that, if young people are involved in their first three electoral opportunities as voters, the habits will form and they will stick with it, so it's not surprise that we've seen a decline in participation in voting, so why not make it available before our young Yukoners go away for university, when they're still in a stable place and can benefit from being part of school and being at home to be supported in learning about that for the first time.

I believe that, too, is an unstoppable wave that's already happening in other parts of the world, even in North America, and this is something that should be strongly considered. There's a petition that has been formed, and young Yukoners have been part of the media in the last weeks, and at the very least, they should have an opportunity to meet with representatives to share that. I know some of them in Whitehorse did last week. There's an opportunity for our

Premier today, our current Premier, who was a high school teacher, who would understand very much, and understand that young people at that age have the cognition and the wherewithal to have a voice. I hope that there is some boldness with this entire government, not just the governing parties, to step forward and explore that issue in particular, and at least give it a voice in the Legislature for further consideration.

There are currently bills in Ottawa, in the Senate, in the House of Commons, that have gone further than ever before on this, so again, I would close by saying this is an inevitable thing. I believe it's obviously going to change, and we will look back on it, as we did with same-sex marriage and many other things that, at the time, seemed controversial, and now, in retrospect, we very much accepted them as status quo and wonder why we didn't do them sooner.

So, rather than follow, Yukon could be a leader, and I would implore all of you to use the powers vested in you to take this opportunity and this moment to take us in the right direction forward on those two issues.

Thank you again for the opportunity, I really appreciate it, and thanks for making this opportunity available to all Yukoners.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sanders. Mr. Cathers, do you have any questions?

Mr. Cathers: I guess I would just start out, first of all, before asking any questions, just by apologizing to those who were there in Carmacks that I wasn't able to attend in person tonight. There was a welcome back event at Hidden Valley school this evening, and I hope that you'll understand, considering the year they've had, that I felt that I should also attend that.

I guess I would just ask, Mr. Sanders, you indicated earlier that you at one time favoured a ranked ballot. Is that still your preferred model, or have your views on that changed?

Mr. Sanders: Thanks for the opportunity to reply. I believe there's some really exciting things around that model that are exciting and worth exploring. I do think that should be one of the top two we consider — the top two or three — and I'm open, frankly, to other solutions, as well, because I think that a number that you are exploring, including some of the proportional flavours, they are all of them better, so much better, than what we have today, and though I have a preference for the ranked ballot, I understand why it's not perfect either, but we shouldn't be seeking perfection here. We should be trying to improve, and all of these are better than what we currently have.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sanders. Mr. Streicker?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks, Ben; thanks, Madam Chair. Ben, can I ask you about what you believe process should look like? We're going to give a report to the Legislative Assembly. There are various things that have been proposed — for example, a citizens' assembly — and we often get into conversations about a referendum, or how Yukoners ultimately choose the system, if there is a recommendation for a specific system, and I'm just wondering what you think process should look like in order to establish, if we were to change the current voting system.

Mr. Sanders: Thanks for the question. I think it's an important one, right? Because we're talking about fundamentally, with the first piece, changing the way that votes occur. In Alaska, I believe the changes that occurred for this recent special ballot didn't require a full referendum. So, on the one hand, there's an opportunity for the government that exists today, that has been brought forward under the current system, to house the power and the responsibility to make that change on their own. I think that is certainly possible and should be considered.

I think it's a big enough change that if there wasn't a strong enough support for that, that a referendum could and should be considered. I think the experience, unfortunately, with referendums is that, often, they're not done particularly well, and sometimes, they're done not necessarily with the intention of actually making the change possible, the way the questions are phrased and whatnot.

So, I'm a big fan in support of a referendum. I don't understand the costs involved in doing so, or the timing of that, but I think that one makes the most sense for this type of big fundamental change, but not opposed to the current government making it, and having the electorate, at the next election, say hey, we didn't like that, we're going to change who is in power to change it back. There is that opportunity that also exists.

With respect to lowering the voting age, I think that is something that should not require a referendum, that could proceed and could be something put forward as a bill in this Sitting this fall. I don't think that we need something bigger or broader than that.

So, my hope is that this is something where we do see change occur, that we don't delay it forever, and that, whatever path is taken, that there is a clear process to move it forward and to do so relatively quickly so that it doesn't fall away or disappear off the time table, or agenda, certainly understanding it's a minority government, and the timings involved in when the next election could be — fixed dates, understandably.

So, to recap, open to the government collectively doing it now; I think a referendum would be my top choice, if it didn't take too long and didn't cost too much for changing the voting system; but we should proceed on lowering the voting age and not need to wait for that.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sanders. Just a follow-up on your proposal on lowering the voting age, one thing that we have heard from folks is a concern that young people aren't well informed enough to vote. What would you say in response to that?

Mr. Sanders: It's interesting that in the Yukon — I think it's for a federal election, but it may occur for a territorial one too — very often there is a process where young people can do a test, or unofficial vote, in school, and often predict, with a great degree of accuracy, how the outcomes actually occur. I think that we are doing a disservice to our young people by believing the double standard that we would trust them to be responsible for their own lives and the lives of others driving before they're 18, but not believe that they would have the cognition and the maturity to be able to vote. I think they're exposed to all the same kind of media and influences that we

are, probably even more on social media than an older demographic, and I think we need to give them a shot. We need to believe in them. I think that they might really surprise us.

They have more of a stake than any of us in the future of climate change and all of these other policies, because they're more likely statistically to live longer than older voters. Let's get them involved early enough so that they feel empowered and feel included and build some positive habits to reverse the trend that we're perpetuating with the decline in participation in our democracy.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Sanders. Any further questions from the Committee?

All right, thank you, Mr. Sanders. Next up, I will ask that Vince Slotte come to the microphone.

Mr. Slotte: Thanks. I guess you can hear me okay like this?

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Slotte: This is upside-down. Actually, since — I'm going to say that I'm a little bit nervous. I have some time for preamble, thank you very much.

Chair: Just to make you feel at ease, you're talking to the five of us in the room, and take your time and don't be nervous. We're interested in what you have to say.

Mr. Slotte: This was written originally thinking there might be a few more people around, so this is going to be a little bit odd. I'm going to stick to it, though.

Dear members of the special committee, I have travelled from Faro today, because I believe electoral reform is an important topic to the territory. I have a lot of thoughts on the topic, but I plan to focus on a few and the important first step. I guess, just recent news, in June, Ontario held a provincial election that resulted in a majority government. This is despite obtaining votes less than one in five eligible votes. It happened because nearly half of the eligible voters didn't bother to show up to vote — it's dismal.

So, *The Globe and Mail* prints out two essays regarding this odd situation. One is a proponent for electoral reform, and one is a proponent for the status quo. Just focusing on the status quo, that essay proposed that the low voter turnout was because the system was working so well that no one feels the need to vote. That's absurd. I have a different word for it, but I'm using absurd.

I have never heard someone suggest they didn't vote because they thought their vote mattered too much. If that is the best argument for status quo, then we clearly need electoral reform. I know we're near the end of the special committee meetings, so what can I really tell you about the need for that? I guess what I'm saying is that it's also evidence that the public is ready for electoral change.

I also realize I can't tell you much about citizens' assemblies that you haven't already heard, so I quickly address the gallery — my wife. The purpose of the citizens' assembly will be to consider a number of electoral systems and recommend a better one. It doesn't have to be the best one, just a better one. If you want to be involved, you put your name forward. You don't have to be a scholar; you don't need to be

a political scientist; you're just choosing a better system for your territory, and as it's your territory, your thoughts matter.

Back to the special committee, I ask that you vote beyond just recommending the citizens' assembly: I'd like to see you advocate for it. Kind of consider how often the government will be asking the public to join in on a fight in a special situation, to be part of the solution. You say, don't take any salmon until we've figured out where they all went, and go plant a tree and save the world; and meanwhile, the governments do little to nothing about a couple of dozen identified threats to salmon, and climate policy is moving slower than the Alsek glacier. People want to be part of the solution, but it's time you treat the patient and not the symptoms.

That's how I feel. So, as I conclude, I just ask the members of the special committee to remember why you entered politics, embrace the youthful idealism that brought you there, plant your tree, and it's a seedling called a citizens' assembly for electoral reform. I truly believe you're going to get some good fruit from that tree. Thank you.

Chair: Thank you, Vince. I appreciate you very much presenting today. It is really important, and actually, I want to start off the questions. When did you start your own education about citizens' assemblies? When did you start looking into that topic?

Mr. Slotte: I hadn't really come across it until about a year ago. I understand Scotland has one going. I understand that Chile, after a long time of a lot of other meddling, is rewriting their constitution on something similar to a citizens' assembly. There's about 150 people working there, putting together a constitution, and I think less than a third are actual politicians. A lot of them are just other people from the community, representing different voices.

The idea of a citizens' assembly, to me — but not answering your question anymore —

Chair: It's okay, go ahead and expand on that idea.

Mr. Slotte: I've been interested in ideas like proportional representation, social value accounting, and all kinds of odd things — I don't know why — but I work a fair bit in BC as well, with a lot of people from BC. They went the referendum method, and it didn't fly. Referendums have a horrible history of people saying, wait a minute, I'm going no, I don't want change, because change scares me. Change scares everybody, but the people I talked to before that sounded really positive. I went, you guys are going to do really well. Everybody is saying we need to change this, but that's not how it turned out.

So, I think the idea of a citizens' assembly will come back with one choice, maybe two choices, but not a whole menu board that will just scare people. This isn't rocket science, but it's difficult to get people to come out for some free fruit and crackers, and now you're going to ask me to put in four or five hours of research, and possibly more, if you really wanted to get your elbows dirty.

Chair: I'm just going to expand a little bit on that. So, one of the experts we had actually presented about citizens' assemblies, and one thing they said that was really important is that it be resourced, so that there is a scholarly type person who

is helping with the education, that people be reimbursed so that everyone is able to participate, that it's not a volunteer, that it is someone who is being paid to be in attendance, and they said the most important part was the education portion.

So, do you think, if Yukon was to go the way of a citizens' assembly, if we were to follow the positive examples we've seen, both nationally and internationally — so, reimbursement, the education portion, and then full support — do you think it would be more successful in that way?

Mr. Slotte: Yes, absolutely.

Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Slotte: You'd need to have a little bit of outside influence. There are a few experts out there. Bring them in from all different vantage points and let the people decide, but it's also important that it's not just people who can afford to have the time off, or afford to travel around, be involved — understand that.

Chair: Great. Mr. Streicker, do you have any questions?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, first of all, thanks for coming from Faro. Really appreciate that you're here to present to us. I'll just keep following up on the notion of a citizens' assembly for the moment. We've heard lots of thinking around what it might look like, how it would — a cross-section of Yukoners, and things like that. I just wonder, when you envision it, what do you picture? What do you think might work for the Yukon?

Mr. Slotte: I'm happy with the lottery.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: The lottery?

Mr. Slotte: I believe that everybody has something to add, and this isn't rocket science, really. It's just choosing among — it will take a little bit of research, because you have so many different — you never have the right boat. As soon as you buy a boat, it's two feet too short, and you buy another, and it's two feet too short, until finally you have this big boat, and you sell it and get a 12-foot aluminum and start over again.

There's nothing that suits every need, but it takes quite a few people getting involved who want to consider a better system. I would trust them to find a better system.

Chair: Mr. Streicker, you had a follow-up?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Yes, and Vince, thank you. One of the things that we've had lots of conversation about is the difference between the communities and Whitehorse. So, if you were thinking of a citizens' assembly, would you want to try to make sure that both those perspectives were represented? Would that be important from your perspective?

Mr. Slotte: I hadn't given it that much thought, but it would make sense. If you just held a lottery, Whitehorse would be so overpowering that you might not have the view from Old Crow, or Faro.

Chair: Yes, so trying to make sure that those views are equally represented between the urban and rural is important then.

Mr. Slotte: Yes, because it will be when the system is put together, but that's still not to say that, just because you live near a Starbucks, you're not thinking of the rural communities.

Chair: We appreciate that. Mr. Cathers, you have a question?

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, and thank you for sharing your thoughts on this, as well as travelling to the meeting from Faro. My question for you would be just on your preference for a citizens' assembly, do you have thoughts on the size of that? The Committee has heard from some people advocating for a citizens' assembly that envisioned it being the same size as the current Assembly of 19 members; some have suggested two people for each riding. There has also been a suggestion, in one of the submissions, of a citizens' assembly of 107 people. What size would you envision, and do you have thoughts on how that should be structured, if that path is taken, to properly represent rural areas and Whitehorse?

Mr. Slotte: Thanks. I hadn't really gotten down to the mechanics of it, but you definitely don't want too few, and you don't want too many, either. I don't know how to answer other than that. I think there are people who have spent more time with it than I have. It wouldn't be the first citizens' assembly around the world, so there would be some advice there, I think, for what has worked elsewhere.

Chair: Mr. Cathers, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Cathers: No, I don't. Thank you for your thoughts on that.

Mr. Slotte: Thanks.

Chair: I actually have another question, Vince. You mentioned referendum, and you used some of the examples where they have failed with complications. One of the things we have heard from an expert is, for example, in British Columbia, they had to meet two requirements: there was a certain percentage over 60 percent where people had to vote in favour, and a certain number of ridings where they had to vote in favour, but it has been suggested by some experts that the threshold could maybe be 50 percent plus, that it doesn't need to be 75 percent.

Do you have any thoughts, if it was to go to a referendum, what you would like to see that look like?

Mr. Slotte: I think the most important part of the referendum is the ability to ask a simple question so you get a simple answer back, but where the threshold would be? I guess I had always thought it might be 50-50, but I can understand for asking for something like 60. I didn't know that about BC. That sounds like a pretty high threshold, because of the double threshold. I believe when New Zealand changed over, there was around 80 percent, which is really rare for a referendum to come in that high for change.

It's difficult to get to 50 percent when you're asking people to change.

Chair: I think you said it really beautifully, when you said it was the ability to ask a simple question and get a simple answer. So, I have written that down. I'm probably going to go through the Hansard to find your quote, because I feel that that is one that will ring true for lots of folks. I'm just going to ask my fellow Committee members if there are any other questions.

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Somewhere toward the end of your presentation, you encouraged us to embrace our youthful selves. Given that we heard from Mr. Sanders earlier, and he had this notion of supporting the voting age coming down to 16, I'm just wondering if you have any thoughts on that.

Mr. Slotte: I don't have any.

Chair: It's okay; you didn't need to come prepared with the full spectrum of questions.

Mr. Slotte: I've heard it, but I haven't really spent the time to give 'er.

Chair: The best news is that you have until September 30 to give it more thought and send in additional comments.

So, Vince, now that you're warmed up and relaxed, are there any closing comments you'd like to share with us? The answer can be no; there's no pressure.

Mr. Slotte: I think of a bunch of things; I hear things all the time, and I go, hey, wait a minute, but no, I think I've used up my time and I should get out while —

Chair: We're delighted that you joined us today. Thank you very much for coming.

Mr. Slotte: No, thank you. This is great.

Chair: Lisa, did you want to speak?

So, at this point in time, I'm going to call a recess, and we will come back, as required.

Recess

Chair: Thank you for joining us. I see that we have just been joined online by Dave Meslin. Dave, if you'd like to turn off your mute, and please, go ahead and present.

Mr. Meslin: Thank you so much, can you hear me okay?

Chair: We can.

Mr. Meslin: Great. Thanks so much for the opportunity. I won't take up too much of your time. I'm in Ontario, many miles away from you, so I don't want to take time away from Yukoners. The reason I'm interested in what you're doing is because the various movements across the country advocating for a better democracy are looking for a province or territory to be a pioneer, to be a leader, to be brave and implement changes that no one else has been able to do. Justin Trudeau infamously said that he was going to change the voting system, and he wasn't able to negotiate that path in Ottawa. We've had various referendums across Canada, in Ontario, PEI, and BC, and there's a wave happening all across the world right now to lower the voting age to 16 with very positive results.

So, I just wanted to encourage you to be bold, to show Canada how things could be done better. Someone needs to break the mould; we're stuck in a rut of tradition, where people say, let's just keep doing it this way, because we've been doing it this way for generations. We wouldn't tolerate that in any other part of our lives.

We update the operating systems of our phones every few months, and it has been a very long time since we updated the operating system of our democracy, and the results — we all know what they are: polarization, hostility, low voter turnout, and people just getting frustrated at the level to which Question Periods have devolved into animosity, and people are losing faith.

So, I'm urging Yukon and all the panelists and everyone involved to be bold and show the rest of this country how we could do it better. That's all. Thank you so much.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Meslin. Just before you — don't go offline, because I imagine there are going to be questions. I will start before I ask my colleagues.

Knowing that you've just joined in from Ontario, which I appreciate — don't worry about taking away time; we're delighted to have you — do you have recommendations or preferences? You did mention lowering the voting age to 16, but if we talk about voting systems, do you have any thoughts on specific voting systems that you would like to see?

Mr. Meslin: Any system that strives to deliver proportionality, or semi-proportionality, is really the goal. There are lots of ways to do that. My personal recommendation is that, if you have the right process, you'll end up with the best system for Yukon.

I personally like the process where you have a citizens' assembly, followed by a referendum. I do believe, at the end of the day, the people should decide what their voting system is, but I also think we need to take the process from the hands of politicians, who, sadly, have proven, whether in Ottawa or otherwise, that there is just too much partisan interest to come together and choose the best systems.

Citizens' assemblies in Ontario, BC, and PEI have all come up with similar solutions. Whether it's MMP or STV, they're all systems that are very much aligned with other western democracies all across Europe, Australia, New Zealand, where there is semi-proportionality.

That's kind of the gold standard, and the beautiful thing about both MMP and STV is that they maintain geographic local representation, while also introducing an element of proportionality.

So, I would urge you to have a citizens' assembly, and what would be really cool — no one has ever done this before — a citizens' assembly followed by a one-time implementation of the recommendation of the assembly, then followed by a referendum. So, if the assembly says, we think MMP would be great for Yukon, try it once, see how it goes, and that way, when people are voting on a referendum, they know what they're talking about. They have tried first-past-the-post, they have tried MMP, and then leave it up to them to decide which one they like better.

Chair: Thank you, Mr. Meslin.

Mr. Streicker or Mr. Cathers?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Thanks, Dave. Can I ask you, just going back to the voting age at 16 — sorry, I know I should look here to talk to you, but I'm looking at you over there — just some of your thoughts about why it's better; like, what are the pros in your mind, or the cons, of the existing system?

Mr. Meslin: Yes, sure, thanks for asking, and I love that you're wearing a T-shirt. That would never fly in Ontario. I should move up there.

So, my son is 17, so I'm speaking personally from experience. I'm sure many other of you have experienced 16 or 17-year olds in your life. For me, from a personal level, I just think they're ready; I know they're ready; I see it in their eyes; I see it in the way they talk. I think that today's teens, despite the mythology and some of the pop culture mythology about

them, I think they're way more mature and informed than I was when I was 16 or 17.

Social media, for all of its drawbacks, does expose people to a lot of information outside of their home and outside of their school. For example, when I was a young teenager, I wasn't marching in the streets against climate change or anything. We weren't marching; we didn't march; we just played video games. The fact that young people are marching out of schools because they care about the future of climate policies is just incredible.

But the main reason I support this has to do with voting habits. We know that, if people vote in their first election, they've now developed a positive relationship with voting, and they've created a habit of self-identifying as a voter. On the flip side, if you miss your first election and you don't vote, you've now created a habit of not voting. Eighteen, 19, and 20 are the worst ages you could introduce voting to people, when very often people have left home, they're living in a new town, they're in a riding they don't really care about, they're not connected to, they're not on the voting list, and they have no opportunity to go to the polling station with their family.

If you introduce voting at the age of 16, it's the exact opposite. You're in high school, you can vote with your parents at the local library, or in a riding that you have a connection to, so the likelihood of you voting in your first election, if we drop the voting age to 16, expands exponentially. So, for that reason alone, I think it's so valuable.

Most importantly, we've seen it done now in countries and cities all across the world, and the sky hasn't fallen; everything is fine.

I'll add one more thing: we do have a program in Canada called Student Vote, and Student Vote allows high school students to vote in a mock parallel election. If you look at the results, it shows that these kids are incredibly thoughtful and they're all different; they're not voting as a mob for the left or the right. In fact, in the most recent federal Student Vote election, the kids voted in equal measure for Conservatives, Liberals, New Democrats, and Greens, right across the board.

So, I guess the question I throw back to you is, why wouldn't we do it?

Hon. Mr. Streicker: Unfortunately, I'm not allowed to answer questions, but appreciate it.

Mr. Meslin: Fair enough.

Chair: Mr. Cathers, do you have a question?

Mr. Cathers: Thank you, and thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts with us. The one thing I would just note is that people may find it interesting to look at what the public survey results were, in terms of Yukoners' opinions on whether the voting age should be lowered to 16. You'll find that on pages 23 and 36 of the report that was done by the Bureau of Statistics. It was interesting that actually, of 16 and 17-year olds, 46.9 percent either agreed or strongly agreed the voting age should remain the same, with 37 percent indicating they disagreed with that statement.

On the specific question of whether the age should be lowered to 16, the numbers were roughly similar, with 37.7 percent of 16 and 17-year olds disagreeing, and 38 percent and

change agreeing, and the overall number from Yukon citizens as a whole was again 68 percent.

I'm not speaking of conclusions at this point, I just think it's worth drawing attention to that. I do appreciate that you've shared your thoughts on that with us, and your thoughts on the benefits of changing the system.

Chair: I'm just going to interrupt for a second, Dave. Do you have a question in that, Mr. Cathers?

Mr. Cathers: I don't really have a question at this point. I appreciate your presentation of your views this evening.

Chair: Thank you. Mr. Meslin, you can absolutely follow that up, if you like.

Mr. Meslin: Yes, I'll just briefly say that I'm not surprised. I think older generations often feel that way about younger generations. I think it's a form of ageism, which, in my sense, is similar in other ways to other forms of discrimination, whether it's based on gender or race. The data doesn't match the preconceived notions that we have of what kids are capable of. I think it's mostly just a kind of a myth that kids are foolish and reckless.

I'll point out that, scientifically, there are two types of cognition: hot cognition and cold cognition. Absolutely, teens are not ready for hot cognition, which is having to make decisions quickly, in the moment, under peer pressure. They have proven to be pretty lousy at that. That type of cognition isn't fully formed until your 20s, but when you give people information and give them time to process that information, and make decisions based on that information, a 16-year old has the capacity as you or me.

In terms of young people self-deprecating themselves and thinking they're not ready, I think that's based on an interesting idea they have that all of their parents are incredibly politically informed. Sadly, it's not true, so, I think they're imagining a level of expertise that they think adults have, and as we all know, political literacy is very low for all levels.

I'll just give one example of how this misconception plays out. Often one of the examples I hear about how kids are so stupid and not ready is this idea that they were eating Tide pods as a joke, because on social media, people were encouraging them to eat Tide pods. If you actually look at the data, hardly any teens did it. It was more of a viral social media sensation; however, hundreds of grown adults did try to drink Lysol after a man in his 70s encouraged them to do so.

So, in terms of who is poisoning themselves by consuming stupid things, it was actually older people being convinced by a senior to do it, not teens.

In so many ways, the reality never matches up with unfair mythology we place upon our own children.

Chair: Mr. Meslin, can I follow up on your referendum? So, you recommended, or suggested, that we look toward a citizens' assembly, to be followed by a referendum. We do have examples in Canada of referendums that have gone forward, and we know that they have never achieved those changes.

One of the things we've heard from an expert witness was the suggestion that the referendum amount is essentially set by the decision-makers, and they use the example of, if first-past-

the-post can elect a government, then why can't similar numbers change a referendum.

Do you have any thoughts on what you think a referendum should look like?

Mr. Meslin: I have a chapter — so, I wrote a book about democracy, called *Teardown: Rebuilding Democracy from the Ground Up*. In it, I describe seven different traits of a well-designed referendum. I can't go into all of it now, because it would take too much time — I could forward you a PDF of that section — but everything from who writes the question to how many options are on the question — is it a binary yes no, or are there options — the time period of the campaign, is there funding for the various campaigns, is it on the same day as an election, or is it organized as a separate stand-alone referendum — all of those factors play into it.

I definitely do like the referendums where you have a few options and you use a ranked ballot, which PEI has tried, and BC has also tried, to varying degrees of success, but I think the details are really important in how you design a referendum. If you decide to have a referendum, I would be very happy to give you lots of advice and ideas about how to make it deliberative and constructive.

Chair: We appreciate that. I would say, on behalf of me, if you wanted to send that excerpt, we're accepting written submissions until September 30 of this year, and I'll ask the Clerk to email you that address, but I think it would be great to have that as part of the public record.

Are there any further questions?

All right, thank you, Mr. Meslin, for joining us today.

Mr. Sanders, as you're back online and there is not a stampede of people joining us, did you have any further comments you would like to share with the Committee?

Mr. Sanders: No further comments. I just really appreciate your time, again, so thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

At this point, we will again take a recess, and we'll come back, as required.

Recess

Chair: Before I adjourn this hearing, I would like to say a few words on behalf of the Committee. First, I would like to thank everyone who presented their thoughts to the Committee in Carmacks, in Mayo, in Dawson City, Watson Lake, and Whitehorse. I would also like to thank the Yukoners who are listening and watching this hearing now and into the future.

I would like to send a big thank you to Hansard for transcribing these proceedings, and of course, I would like to thank Gúnta Business for facilitating these community hearings.

Information on the Committee's public hearings, including transcripts and recordings, will be available on the Committee's webpage at yukonassembly.ca/SCER. The public can learn more about potential voting systems at HowYukonVotes.ca

This hearing is now adjourned.

The Committee adjourned at 7:56 p.m.