Citizens' Democracy Forum

John Carley, chair, Elgin, ON

SUBMISSION to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform
August, 2016

SMPP - SINGLE MEMBER PARTY PROPORTIONAL
THE SIMPLE WAY TO REAL ELECTORAL REFORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This submission assumes that the Special Committee intends to recommend to Parliament the electoral system:

a) that best approaches the ideal - that is, that produces a House of Commons that reflects as accurately as possible the political preferences of the electorate, and
b) that it does so with as little physical change as possible to Parliament itself or to the voting process.

Our proposal very effectively achieves both of the above objectives. It uses the current electoral system with only the addition of a second ballot for the elector, as is used in other proportional voting systems. No change is needed in electoral boundaries. The only change needed in the House of Commons would be the addition of a simple software system to track and record Parliamentary votes.

This submission prepared and submitted August, 2016 by
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SMPP - THE SIMPLE WAY TO REAL ELECTORAL REFORM

In this submission, the Citizens' Democracy Forum (see note*) has assumed that the Special Committee intends to recommend to Parliament the system:

a) that best approaches the ideal - that is, that produces a Parliament that truly reflects the political preferences of the electorate, and
b) that it does so with as little disruption as possible to Parliament itself or to the cost or complexity of the voting process.

By definition, the first objective (a) requires a Proportional Representation system (PR) as has been recognized by most developed countries. To achieve proportionality many countries have chosen to use some form of Mixed Member Party Proportional (MMPP) system in which the elector is given two ballots: the first being the usual vote for the local MP (the Local Vote) and a second ballot for their preferred governing party (the National Vote). In the MMPP system, additional MPs are appointed from each of the political parties to be seated in Parliament together with the locally-elected MPs in the numbers needed to approach the proportionality needed to reflect the National Vote. However, such a system can require significant changes in the number of seats in Parliament and/or in the electoral district boundaries. To avoid such a major disruption, other voting systems have been suggested, (e.g., the Ranked Ballot or Single Transferable Vote systems), none of which can reliably produce proportionality.

To achieve objective (b) we propose here a way to obtain the truest possible proportionality by using the current electoral system with no need for major changes or disruptions. For the voter, the change need only be an additional ballot, the National Vote, as is used in the Mixed Member Proportional system. The new system retains the existing single elected member system. No party-appointed MPs are used. Proportionality is achieved simply by assigning to each elected party caucus in Parliament a percentage weight that reflects the support they received from the National Vote - a weight that is then divided among the caucus members. This system requires no seating change in the House of Commons or in electoral boundaries. As with MMPP, our proposal meets the principles set out by the Special Parliamentary Electoral Reform Committee (see Appendix A) and the guidelines set out by the Broadbent Institute (see Appendix B).

We call this electoral system Single Member Party Proportional or SMPP (see note**). Under SMPP each elected MP will retain their vote in Parliament but the weight of that vote will reflect the percentage of the National Vote received by the MP's party (see Appendix C). For Parliamentary votes a simple computation system can be used to record each vote and to make the voting summations instantly for the Speaker. This simple computation system is the only change needed in the operation of Parliament. As well, a simple software program (app) could make it possible for MPs or the public to quickly calculate the voting weight of any groupings of MPs - for example for the purpose of forming voting blocks, coalitions, etc.

As with other proportional voting systems, the use of a threshold [such as, for example, three or five percent of the National Vote and/or the election of at least one MP] will discourage the proliferation of smaller parties.When a smaller party reaches the National Vote threshold but does not elect a MP their voting weight could be negotiated to another Parliamentary party. In the unlikely event that a small party elects one or more MPs without reaching the National Vote threshold, their voting weight in Parliament would reflect their percentage of the National Vote.

This SMPP system is accurately proportional and has all the advantages of other PR voting systems, including the following:

- **The Voter's choice of local candidate need not depend on party affiliation,** a positive factor in the relationship between MPs and their constituents.

- A Less Confrontational Tone of Parliamentary Discourse will be encouraged as the political parties will usually find it in their interest to form alliances or governing coalitions.

- Government Policies will better reflect the wishes of the voters and the broad policy swings of the past will be less likely to occur (Knutsen, 2011, p. 86).

- Voter Turnout will increase as voters know that their vote will always count (Blais & Aarts, 2006, p.191).

- **No Further Need for Strategic Voting**

IN CONCLUSION, the Citizens' Democracy Forum (CDF) urges our Parliamentarians to consider this simple SMPP electoral system. It will achieve accurate Proportional Representation at little cost and with little disruption of the current electoral system or of the House of Commons. It would be readily accepted by the Canadians electorate. Finally, SMPP could be implemented virtually overnight and could be amended easily at any time.

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Notes

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**A similar system proposed in the UK is called Direct Party and Representative Voting or DPR (see http://www.dprvoting.org). This website explains how special Parliamentary situations (e.g. Free Votes) can be handled.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Electoral system principles as expressed by the Parliamentary Committee to Reform Canada's electoral system:

First Principle: Canadians should believe that their intentions as voters are fairly translated into elections results, without (the) significant distortion that often characterizes elections conducted under the First-Past-The-Post system.

Second Principle: Canadians' confidence needs to be restored – in their ability to influence politics and in their belief that their vote is meaningful.
Third Principle: Reforms need to increase diversity in the House of Commons and politics more broadly.

Fourth Principle: The chosen reform can't make the electoral system more complex.

Fifth Principle: Voting needs to be user-friendly and accessible.

Sixth Principle: Maintain the vital local connection an MP has with their constituents.

Seventh Principle: It needs to be be secure and verifiable.

Eighth Principle: Canadians need to be inspired to find common ground and consensus.

Appendix B: The Broadbent Institute report on Canadian Electoral Reform lists five goals Canadians most value in an electoral system:
1. the ballot is simple and easy to understand;
2. the system produces stable and strong government;
3. the system allows you to directly elect MPs who represent your community;
4. the system ensures that the government has MPs from each region of the country; and
5. the system ensures that the number of seats [or Parliamentary Votes] held by a party in Parliament closely matches their actual level of support throughout the country." (Broadbent Institute, 2015, p.21)

Appendix C: If the 2015 federal election was held under the Single Member Party Proportional electoral system, in alphabetical order the results would be as follows:
– Bloc Quebec: 4.7% of national vote = 15.8 H. of C. Votes or 1.5 votes per MP
– Conservative: 31.9% of national vote = 107.8 H. of C. Votes or 1.1 votes per MP
– Green: 3.5% of national vote = 11.8 H. of C. Votes or 11.8 votes per MP
– Liberal: 39.5% of national vote = 133.5 H. of C. Votes or 0.72 votes per MP
– New Democratic: 19.7% of national vote = 66.5 H. of C. Votes or 1.5 votes per MP.