

Brief
submitted to
Special Committee on Electoral Reform
Parliament of Canada
by
Allan R. Gregory
(As an Individual)

Date: September 26, 2016

BY EMAIL: erre@parl.gc.ca

Chair and Members
Special Committee on Electoral Reform
Parliament of Canada

Dear Chair and Members,

Regrettably, I do not have time to prepare a brief which complies with the last recommended criterion/condition set out at www.parl.gc.ca/Committees/en/ERRE/StudyActivity?studyActivityId=9013025, as well as the first four mandatory criteria/conditions.

My brief has its origin in the speaking notes I used when I shared my views on electoral reform with my local Member of Parliament, Anita Vandenberg, Ottawa West-Nepean, at a Town Hall she held in the riding on September 17, 2016. The brief thus consists of two parts:

- A. An email from the M.P. explaining, among other things, how the Town Hall would be structured; and
- B. A lightly edited version of my original speaking notes.

Yours sincerely
Allan R. Gregory
Ottawa West-Nepean

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PART A – The Local M.P.'s Email

RE: Electoral Reform

Thursday, September 8, 2016 10:41 AM

From: "Anita.Vandenbeld@parl.gc.ca" <Anita.Vandenbeld@parl.gc.ca>

To: *****

Dear Mr. Gregory,

Thank you for your recent email concerning electoral reform as well as your thoughts and suggestions. The Government of Canada has committed to consultations with Canadians about making our electoral system more inclusive and more fair. I would like to invite you to participate in a Town Hall meeting at the Ukrainian Hall (1000 Byron Avenue) on September 17, 2016, on how to improve our electoral system and our democracy.

From 6:00pm to 7:30pm citizens will be given an opportunity to comment on the kind of electoral system they would like to see. In addition, from 7:30pm to 9:00pm I want to hear your ideas about what else we need to do to make our democracy work better for Canadians.

How we elect our MP's is only part of the solution. Giving our MPs the ability to truly represent the voices of their constituents and make a real impact on legislation, policies and decision-making is even more important. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, which helps to establish the rules of Parliament, and I would like constructive ideas on what I can propose to make parliament more inclusive and participatory and less partisan.

In my international work, I worked with politicians in over 70 countries to bring excluded and marginalized voices into decision-making processes. I have advised Parliaments on how to make committees more effective; how to develop cross-party cooperation; how to ensure human rights and minority voices were included; how to engage citizens; and how to encourage women's political participation.

Since being elected in October, I have held mini-town hall meetings weekly at Tim Hortons, weekly drop-in hours at my constituency office, and hosted four Town Hall meetings.

I have also chaired the special Parliamentary committee on pay equity. As chair I ensured that all committee meetings were, by default, held in public and televised. I also supported a motion in the Procedure committee to limit the ability for a parliamentary committees to go "in camera" - meaning that major votes and decisions by committees will be held in public so that MPs can be held to account. More recently, I brought together MPs from all parties to host the first meeting of the all-party women's caucus at which MPs joined aboriginal elders for a blanket ceremony on the Hill for reconciliation. I look forward to more cooperation through the all-party women's caucus in the Fall session.

While I was elected with 56% of the vote, we live in a riding that has all but once before elected

their MP with less than 50% of the vote. I want citizens to be able to vote FOR the candidate(s) they like rather than just AGAINST a candidate they don't like. I believe that giving people more choice in voting and engaging them between elections to give them more positive reasons to want to vote, will make for better democracy.

I am eager to hear more from you! I hope you can attend this Town Hall meeting and help spread the word about this important event.

Yours sincerely,
Anita Vandenberg, M.P.
Ottawa West-Nepean

PART B – The Submitter’s Speaking Notes

Town Hall, Part 1

[Submitter to M.P.:]

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views on electoral reform with you tonight.

I support Fair Vote Canada’s four core values on electoral reform, viz.,

- 1) Proportional Representation: e.g., 30% of the [popular] vote should equal [as nearly as possible] 30% of the seats in Parliament.
- 2) Voter Equality: every voter should be able to elect an MP who reflects her/his values.
- 3) Diversity: Parliament should reflect Canada’s diversity, including the political diversity within each region.
- 4) Collaboration: i.e., a Parliament in which parties work together and pass laws supported by parties representing a majority of voters, both of which are natural outcomes of proportional representation.

I would like to add that changing Canada’s voting system to a proportional one should be a NO-BRAINER. The First-Past-The-Post system is simply NOT fit for purpose and should have been replaced with a proportional system long ago. That it has not been reflects poorly, in my opinion, on the commitment of previous governments to prioritize the national interest over the governing party’s interest.

I also want to tell you that I am very concerned that the Prime Minister is evidently on record as having expressed support for the Alternative Voting system [i.e., the single member district ranked ballot system], which is used to elect members to the House of Representatives in Australia.

If Canada were to adopt the Alternative Vote, it would be a major step in the WRONG direction, because the Alternative Vote would produce a House of Commons which would in general be even more politically UNREPRESENTATIVE of the electorate than the House produced by First-Past-The-Post.

Town Hall, Part 2

[Submitter to M.P.:]

Thank you for this opportunity to share my views on these matters with you tonight.

I should like to commend you

- for recognizing that changing how Canadians elect MPs is only part of the solution for making Parliament a more democratic and representative institution; and

- for asking for constructive ideas on what you can propose as a member of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to make Parliament more inclusive and participatory and less partisan.

In that context, I should like to refer you to an excellent brief entitled “*Implementing electoral reform: Specific issues with regard to forming and maintaining a responsible and legitimate government in our parliamentary democracy*”, which was submitted to the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE) by Dean Hugo Cyr, Faculty of Political Science and Law, University of Quebec at Montréal. I shall give your staff a paper copy (absent the Appendix) for your future consideration.

<Ends>