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### Comments and Recommendations for the Special Committee

In mid September the Liberal Party of Canada Party of Canada EDA in the North Okanagan –Shuswap decided to launch their own consultation on electoral reform patterned after the process being followed by the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. It was a non-partisan exercise following the 5 principles set out by the Special Committee, the particular changes being examined and would use a survey based on the Committee's form that was to be provided by those participating.

The decision came about because Mr. Mel Arnold, MP for the Riding of the North Okanagan-Shuswap, did not proceed with any public meetings about electoral reform in the Riding. Instead, Mr. Arnold's office mailed a flyer to all voters in the Riding that was not about the consultation on Electoral Reform It appeared to be an attempt to solicit support for a referendum, presumably to stop any changes being made to the electoral system. There was no reference to the Special Committee's work that was being done or any of their objectives.

There were a number of meetings held throughout the Riding in community halls and coffee shops from September 19<sup>th</sup> to October 6<sup>th</sup> and I attended several of them. I think that I have a good sense about what the participants felt about the process and what they wanted to see in changes to the electoral system.

The common theme from many people was that they wanted to learn more about the process and felt that more education would be helpful. The people who took part were from all political persuasions and the discussions were reasoned and respectful. The majority of participants were 55 and older and that reflects the demographics of the riding and the fact that a number of the meeting were held during the day when people would be busy working.

I have the following comments about changes suggested:

Mandatory Voting- It seems that many people are not in favour. I agree and think that there are better methods to encourage people to vote. We could start by giving Elections Canada an expanded role and a mandate to find ways to increase participation.

Online voting should be considered as well as lowering the voting age to 16. Both of these changes would attract higher participation from young voters as many of them are not comfortable with going out to vote at voting stations and are very comfortable using social media. Perhaps more education is needed and by lowering the voting age, this would present opportunities for the educational systems, working with Election Canada, to develop appropriate programs. Online voting would be useful to many voters in this part of the country who must be away from their homes for periods of time to work for example oilfield workers, construction workers, truck drivers, etc.

Online voting may be difficult to implement as security issues are important as voters must have trust in the voting system. Many older voters are unfamiliar with computers and worry about unauthorized access to voting records.

Electronic voting may be appropriate if a decision is made to change to a Proportional Representation System that is more complicated. In order to have timely results updated technology would be required.

Parliament and parliamentarians need to improve their image and show that they deserve the salaries and financial support that is given to them to carry out their duties. All parties should work to clean up Question Period. There are many people who have no confidence in their MPs and do not trust the political parties to do the right thing.

I am concerned about Proportional Representation as I see the use of party lists as a lessening of the links between voters and MPs. The North Okanagan-Shuswap Riding is a large riding with a mix of urban and rural voters. Proportional Representation likely would result in a larger riding and make it more difficult for people outside of the urban areas to be in touch with their MP. In the case of a Proportional Representation Mixed Member system, it has been suggested that there would be at least 100 MPs elected via party lists and I wonder who they would represent. It would make it easier for the political parties as they could simply add high profile candidates that are recruited with every election to their list. That way, they would not end up with the “bad press” and upset members when a high profile candidate is imposed on a riding.

There are a large variety of methods of Proportional Representation and they are often difficult for voters to understand. One of the 5 principles refers to a voting system that is not complicated. The Committee should be very careful not to adopt unproven systems like the one proposed by Fair Vote Canada and others that I believe combines First Past the Post and Proportional Representation called Rural/Urban Proportional Representation.

We need a system that is simple and easy for voters to understand. First Past the Post does this but often MPs are elected without receiving the votes of a

majority of voters in their riding. A number of people who attended the meetings I was at made the comment that their votes don't count under that system. A Preferential Ballot or Ranked Ballot would institute a process where all MPs would have to achieve 50% of the votes in their riding to be elected. This could be by way of voters ranking their vote by preference and the second and third choices would be used if no one had 50%. Another wrinkle would be to have a Run Off or a second round of voting between the two candidates with the highest votes like the Presidential Elections in a number of countries. This might be preferable as voters would have an opportunity to cast a second ballot and there would be less of the feeling that their vote was lost as often happens with the third and fourth place finishers. Granted, it would increase the election cost and delay the final result but it may very well have the effect of increasing participation, especially in the second round of voting. There could be an increase of voter interest and candidates would have a chance to make their appeals to voters prior to the day of the second vote. I believe that this should be held quickly, say a period of 7 days after the original date of voting.

Regardless of what system is adopted, a trial period of the new systems would be useful. Perhaps a by-election would be a good place to test the new system or systems of voting.

I do not believe that a Referendum is appropriate but consideration could be given having one after the fact as was done in New Zealand after two elections were held under the Proportional Representation Mixed Member system adopted.