

Democratic Reform

First, I would like to compliment you on following up on this election promise to make every vote count. There will be a lot of pressure to avoid this actually happening. Areas to guard against include:

- A Referendum that will delay implementation until after the next election,
- A threshold that is so high that many people will not be represented,
- A ranking system that impedes smaller Parties from presenting views that may not be part of the current status quo but still important to Canada's future, and
- Limiting access.

I grew up with the understanding that I had a responsibility to vote as part of our democratic rights. I soon learned, however, that depending on where I was living, my vote usually did not count. The habit was formed so I have continued.

I became interested in politics as an adult after having worked abroad in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean. I saw firsthand what poor government can do to the economy and the impact of dictators on all aspects of society, both social and economic, and especially with respect to human rights.

It doesn't take much thinking to realize that the current "winner takes all" system is archaic and undemocratic, especially in a country as diverse in so many ways as ours. The size, urban/rural split, geographic regions, population density, cultural and ethnic differences, and historical factors all suggest that if we are to continue to have a viable and united country, then we need to give expression to the many voices of Canada.

Some form of a proportional representation system is a given if we are to be truly democratic. The argument that voting systems such as the MMP are too complicated is hard to swallow! Most enlightened countries have adopted some version of a PR system. Are we any less capable of understanding a different, more representative system? Admittedly, Canadians are a bit reluctant to embrace change. However, with the process to solicit feedback from a wide range of Canadians, we should be able to create a voting mechanism that is fair, democratic and truly Canadian. There is also much experience we can glean from other democratic countries. This means some combination and variation of existing PR voting mechanisms will probably best suit Canada. While many of us may have strong feelings for a particular system, this is why we have created a non-partisan team to investigate and present a carefully crafted new system for us. They have the responsibility and authority to do so.

As we move into the digital age, we must be cognizant of the changes that technology has already

brought. Most importantly, we need to recognize that younger adults think and react differently than those of us over forty-five. If we want to include them in our democratic process, then more digital material must be readily available and user friendly. On-line voting must be an option. Although there is some danger from hackers, the greater danger is not having young adults engaged in our democratic process. Also, on-line voting is essential if we are to give ready access to many people with a disability.

I would also like to see us go back to the system where part of Party financing comes from per vote subsidies. This is highly democratic. At the same time, we should cut back on the too-generous rebates for donations and for Parties after an election. As well, the cap on donation amounts should be reduced since this is becoming increasingly unfair to the shrinking middle class.

I am open regarding mandatory voting. I prefer the PR team to listen carefully. Will this encourage or discourage voters? And, how would it be implemented and monitored?

Finally, the threshold for a PR system is critical. If too low, like in Italy and Israel, it can cause havoc in trying to govern. This is also a common argument against a PR system. If too high, the PR voting system becomes a sham. I assume this aspect can be designed to be flexible for modification with experience, but I would suggest between 3% and 5% would be appropriate.

If you have questions, please feel free to respond by email or phone.

Sincerely,

Joe Foster

P.S. I tried desperately to use the other options but was shocked to discover the site is not accessible. In spite of a number of attempts, I got "hung up" each time and even when working it was still difficult to follow using JAWS. I am not impressed...