

My comments on electoral reform, by Robert McCroskey, Surrey, BC

The present activity of "voting" has so many real problems that it is almost impossible to repair; therefore it is little wonder that voter turnout has fallen off. Everyone already knows how the real power in government flows - it comes not from that futile trip to the voting booth every four years - it comes from a Business person being able to pick up the phone any day of the year and have his way with the government official. Until that undue influence is removed and treated as the crime which it is, you cannot expect the voter to see any significance of voting.

Many decades ago in Latin class in high school, our Latin teacher, on having to leave the classroom for a few minutes, would say "The true measure of a person's character is what he would do if he knows no one is watching", implying that we should all be good while she is out of the room. For the vast majority of the population, very little good and very much bad occurs in circumstances where nobody is looking, where the people are left to their own thoughts and desires. In this way, the vaunted secret ballot drops in to that dark area of human nature because the voting booth is one of those places where nobody is looking, relegating voting to the social equivalence of masturbation and shoplifting. That little quiet place in the voting booth is about the farthest you can get from consensus-building and is often a realm for retribution.

And worse, the voters are sent to the booth amongst a barrage of partisan and business propaganda and are supposed to make a rational decision on their ballots. How can the assembling of ballot results into an election "result" be counted as a poll of opinion under those conditions? That compilation of ballot marks does not constitute consensus building because there was zero discussion amongst the ballot markers. Replacing the secret ballot box with a small-group town-hall meeting would be a better attempt at consensus building since people would be able to discuss and defend their position and make the necessary compromises and accommodations for that group to come to a conclusion as to the best choice for their group. Isn't that what democracy should be all about - coming to a decision as to what is the best outcome for all? Many people are upset with low voter turnout, but most are unwilling to look at the flaws in the voting process. Some consider proportional representation to be the answer, but that system merely forces consensus-building onto the floor of the legislative body while taking it away from the neighbourhood level.

To give voters a proper choice on a ballot, especially in municipal elections, there must be a "no" vote on the ballot, actually two types of "no" votes. The first one, right across the top, must have a yes/no choice for the question – "Do you support the present system of governance?" If you vote yes, then you proceed to section below, the list of candidates, each of which has a "yes" and "no" box. In the

candidates section (for each seat being contested), you are allowed one “yes” and one “no”. In such a system, I could vote “no” for the candidate that I most dislike and then vote “Yes” for my real choice. This system could reduce the need for "strategic" voting. The “no” votes would have to be deducted from that candidate's “yes” votes. If you vote "no" for the system of governance, then you have voiced your complaint against the present system and of course leave the candidate votes blank.

Then for every contested seat where a candidate does not get a majority of the votes, there has to be a runoff election the following week until there is a majority winner. It is important to have the runoff elections – this is the best way to fix the “first-past-the-post” system. The run-off vote is also a way to get past the "voting blind" aspect of the secret ballot - you know how your previous choice compared to the choices of others, and the group as a whole can make a better guess as to which way to proceed in the next vote. If these improvements are implemented, then it would be possible to make voting compulsory.

As for the problems with the present system of governance, note that there is no house representing the collective private interest. Entire bloat of government is supported on your vote for one single person who after the election turns into a "trained seal" and represents the government back to you. Most Canadians voted against Harper in previous elections but since there is not a meaningful "no", he came into virtually unlimited power having only minority support. Every aspect of this problem must be changed.