

Deep Electoral Reform

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Canadian citizen.

I humbly ask to share my views as someone who has studied, practiced (as a public servant) and thought much about *governance*. The issue of electoral reform is closely related.

In forming your final opinions, please consider the very root of the question at the heart of this debate: why is it that we *have* elections? The answer of course is to be represented in Parliament, to hold the Federal Government accountable for its decisions and programs. But we need to dig deeper – why and for what do we need to hold government accountable?

What we need as citizens is two-fold:

Firstly, we need a way as citizens to hold the Federal Government accountable and responsive to our day-to-day needs and surprise occurrences. We need a way to reach decision-makers and administrators when something's going wrong with a federal program, whether it be health, income security, or infrastructure related. Good MP's are usually appreciated most for the services they render to constituents in need, such as stepping in when the passport office is administratively dragging its feet, or raising issues of local concern, such as drug epidemics, floods or farmers in need, to the federal agenda. Governance in this case means addressing the needs of Canadians as individuals, families and communities.

Secondly, we need a way as citizens to voice our values, our aspirations for our country, and sometimes our fears – and somehow to see how these are reflected in the balancing act that is law-making and rule-setting. We need the rules that we all collectively agree to live with to at some level fit our understanding of the world, and our understanding of what is good, and what will be good for our children, and our children's children. Governance in this case means addressing the needs of Canadians as part of a broader, ever-changing society, bound by collective conventions.

With this basic framework, you will see that what we have currently in the House of Commons and the Senate is a mishmash of these two needs: Members of Parliament (MP's) are elected to represent their

constituents but they are also obligated by the current system to be part of a political party, and thus to uphold certain policy positions. Sometimes these truly align to this person's views and experiences – but sometimes parties use bullying tactics to force their hand, hence the existence of party “Whips” who will curtail traveling privileges and office budget to keep them in line).

The idea of behemoth political parties such as the ones we currently have in Canada – institutions that represent positions on hundreds of different policy issues - starts looking odd when you consider that one MP may have the same views on fiscal prudence as another from across the country, yet completely disagree with them regarding the death penalty, sexual liberalism, immigration or the legalization of cannabis. Yet these MP's are obligated to operate as part of the same political organization, and to toe the same party line – assuredly a sometimes very uncomfortable situation.

Some of these folks wanted to get into this business to solve the needs of their neighbors and communities; some have ideas about how this country should be shaped; and some do it for fame or power. But in the end their position puts them all squarely astride of these two sometimes competing needs of their citizens – to be represented as individuals, and as part of a wider society – and the evidence shows that this grinds MP's down.

The Samara project (<http://www.samaracanada.com/>) has done a great job of uncovering how MP's exiting their positions most often felt strongly dissatisfied with their overall experience – often citing a sense of helplessness, or a lack of ability to influence the machine (while also finding much validation in helping citizens in urgent need).

The Senate is similarly confused – though it is supposed to be the seat of “sober second thought”, Senators are also obligated to be affiliated with a political party – and the institution is now unabashedly being used as a way to reward the party faithful.

What I propose may seem bold, but life is short.

I suggest that we re-establish and clarify the roles of our two Houses in Parliament.

The first House should be concerned with matters of policy, with addressing the needs of Canada as a whole country, in its relations to the rest of the world, and regarding its economic direction and

environmental future. The members of this house should be allowed to form coalitions, or voting blocks – if we must keep the dinosaur political parties around, let them play here.

How the members of this House are elected becomes an interesting question – the members here will be representing ideas and political positions, not specific geographic constituencies. So the members could come from party ranks, designated by party leadership, to populate the various committees that oversee the work of the Federal Government – they would be present in the House in proportion to the vote garnered by that party in the previous election.

The second House should be primarily concerned with matters of direct importance to their constituents and their communities – they will be the doorway between Canadians and their federal institutions when other avenues have not worked. They would also have a role in sounding our their constituency on proposals made by the other House: they would solicit feedback, raise and address any unforeseen consequences to federal policy and programs should they arise. To best accomplish this role, representatives would not be politically affiliated, or represent policy positions based solely on their personal views; their role would be to seek to represent the balance of views present in their constituency, to the best of their abilities.

How the members of this House are elected also becomes an interesting question – voters should be free to choose who they have the most faith in, and the one with the most votes should have the honour of serving. But an interesting system could also involve selecting Canadians at random - a national lottery to populate a roster of candidates for a given constituency. It would be the duty of those selected to attempt to serve if they are able, and they would face a ballot election where voters can select the one they want as point-person for the following four years. After a first term, a representative interested in serving a second could simply face a “yes” or “no” ballot question and avoid the costly business of electioneering altogether.

My hastily-described solutions are but an attempt to work with the framework for governance that I have laid out for you above. I sincerely hope that in coming to your own conclusions, you will do the same. Thank you for your time.