

## Submission to The Special Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reform

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### *Preamble and Summary:*

It is understood that the case for electoral reform has been made and accepted sufficiently now, otherwise this committee would not have been formed.

The opinions below are presented in the context of other submissions to the committee, such as from Fair Vote Canada, which carefully discuss the benefits of some model of proportional representation. The committee will have received presentations of the pros and cons of various electoral systems which attempt to improve the democratic process.

For efficient communication, the “take home messages” I wish to convey are listed immediately below. Arising from consideration of the principles in the mandate of the committee, and in the context of the public discussion, several of these will need no further comment. To provide some rationale for others, a few paragraphs follow the list.

- The current “first past the post” (FPTP) system should be changed.
- Local and proportional representation should be integrated in the system.
- A type of Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system is favoured.
- Undesirable size and complexity argues against Multi-Member Ridings.
- There may be a place for voluntarily ranking in ballots.
- But voter action should be simple and easily understood. The simplest would be a vote for a local candidate and a vote for a party.
- Independent candidates would have a better chance locally when people can also influence the success of a party.
- The algorithm for determining the proportionality component should be conceptually simple for the majority, but not necessarily for everyone as long as they have a sense of what it does.
- The design of MMP should not alter much, if at all, the number of members of parliament.
- The lists for the proportionality component should be prepared from candidates who ran unsuccessfully for election in a riding, unless they opt out of the list, and should be ranked by vote proportion.
- It may be reasonable to allow parties to move a small, limited number of names in their ordered list.
- There should be no referendum. It is a blunt tool of democracy. It allows all-or-nothing decisions to be made in ignorance, confusion or misconception.
- Our democracy is powered by cooperative teams governed by people elected to make decisions which affect us. This reform should come from non-partisan consensus among them.
- The effectiveness and democratic value of the system chosen should be subjected to monitoring and review in case government needs to make adjustments to it after sufficient time for reliable data.
- Voting should not be mandatory, and voting age should coincide with legal adult age.

**Local and party representation:** There is a degree of idealism, frequently subconscious, behind support for, or criticism of any particular electoral system. For example, proportional representation (PR) would not be an issue in a no-party system of government. One argument from those who oppose electoral reform is based on this ideal and warns that PR could lead to voter isolation from their community. On the other hand, they worry that PR would lead to indecisive coalition governments, a notion clearly based on the value of party, not local representation.

Political parties play a dominant role in our federal and provincial governments. In an appropriately regulated context they contribute in several valuable ways to our democratic system, one of which is in promoting ongoing public involvement. Being a member of a political party has advantages for a candidate, but it means that if elected they would represent both their party and their local community, and would encounter occasional conflicts in these responsibilities. Thus electors weigh, with a range of biases, any candidate as local representative and as one who will promote the broader goals of their party. In either case, choosing among parties, or choosing among multiple candidates for a local representative, a ranked ballot method would facilitate the cooperative process.

**Ranked Ballots:** Continuing from the above discussion, since, as mandated, local representation should be preserved in any system considered, and also because people tend to mentally rank the acceptability of parties, the possibility of employing ranked ballots should be considered. Simplicity for all voters, however, is important in the consideration.

**Electoral system favoured (MMP):** Considering the various systems described in the ERRE document, I do not see the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system doing much better than FPTP for giving minority, but popular parties (e.g. the Green Party) the representation they deserve in government.

Sensibly the government is not considering any system which removes a local representative. This ensures the government's roots are in communities across the country, but also ensures a strong sense of continuity from the previous system.

As I see it, that leaves a form of MMP as the best option. It is worth noting that MMP helps not only **minority parties** but also **independent candidates**. An independent candidate can make the case that a vote for them as a local representative does not prevent a voter from also supporting a particular party.

**Districts:** Obviously, if one does not want to increase the number of MPs in government, the districts must be enlarged to allow for a pool from which to select the proportionality component. To maintain a sense of belonging to one's district, there should be the minimum practical degree of enlargement.

**Lists, list membership and order:** It is understandable that a party might want a fixed (closed) list for the proportionality adjustment, because it would allow them to favour particular talents among its members of parliament. An open list with input from voters may sound more democratic, but it would increase the complexity of the system, especially for the voter, and possibly cause stress for, or exclude some voters, depending on the input mode employed. It would also expend more marketing time and money.

The criticism that MMP leads to two classes of MP, electoral verses list, can and must be addressed. While Senators, chosen for their expertise and acquired wisdom, should not be expected also to have the political skills necessary and time to use them in an election campaign, members of parliament need to have interacted with the people during election campaigns, and have active channels of communication with the people they represent. The list should be the list of all candidates after

removing those who were elected in their district and those who willingly opt out of the list. Ideally, the list order should reflect the vote proportion obtained by the candidates who were unsuccessful in their electoral district. Perhaps further consideration would concede some small flexibility in list order to accommodate a party's special preferences. But the mechanisms for producing and using lists must be the same for all parties.

I think the quibble about this approach leading to some electoral districts ending up with two representatives is trivial. There would be only one representative from any district. The list members chosen as elected via the proportionality component, even though they campaigned in a particular district, would introduce themselves to the country as a whole and be expected to interact with all of that implied constituency. (One can easily think of ways to do this).

**Voting age:** A person should have the vote as soon as they are treated by law as an adult. Even then, a person is not necessarily ready to make a choice at election time, so they must be allowed to use their own judgement as to whether to vote in any given election. I am against *mandatory voting*.

**Non-partisan, informed consensus. No Referendum:** The focus of the committee is on an electoral system for Canada, and not on the mechanism for deciding the change. But unless the committee is willing to have wasted time and money on this process, its members should be ready to advise parliament against a referendum.

There is so much misunderstanding of how democracy works that the government would be justified in enlisting help from a few non-partisan students of democracy to get people thinking in a more sophisticated way about democracy and the several pillars which support it. A lot of people fall too easily into the trap of believing that it is about giving everybody a vote in any controversial decision.

Rather than the ultimate tool of democracy, a referendum is a last resort and a very blunt tool of democracy to be used seldom and with care and wisdom. It is usually called for out of emotion, ignorance or a reckless manipulation of power.

A hallmark of our democracy is the popular support of people who's judgement is expected to provide good management of the government of the country. They do so by drawing on community-based knowledge, wisdom and skill. It comes from the obvious truth that each of us has something valuable to contribute, but that none of us has every skill, all knowledge, and infallible understanding. We work as a team of teams, ideally with transparency, communication, checks and balances.

The government has strong popular support for some change to the electoral system. At every step, the chosen best recommendation, its mode of implementation, monitoring and review over the several terms necessary to prove it, should have good overall non-partisan support. Meanwhile, the people should be kept informed with clear explanations.

*Thank you for considering these views.*