

SUBMISSION TO THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ELECTORAL REFORM

NORTH OKANAGAN-SHUSWAP

OCTOBER 7, 2016

SUMMARY

This submission is a summary of the views of 288 residents (including 74 Grade 11 students from Seaton Secondary School in Vernon) who participated in 15 Electoral Reform Dialogues hosted by the North Okanagan -Shuswap Electoral District Association of the Liberal Party of Canada (the “Association”) from September 19th to October 6th, 2016.

Many of the people who attended the sessions either want electoral reform or are open to making changes that would make Canada’s democracy more accessible, effective and legitimate. A small number expressed their satisfaction with the current system and opposed any change.

At every session, attendees wanted more information about electoral reform. Most people were not clear on the various voting systems being considered.

At the largest session (47 participants in the City of Vernon), there was significant support for a proportional system and many of the attendees were well versed in the different options. However, in the smaller groups in rural communities, many participants expressed a concern about the complexities of a proportional system. At almost every session we heard about participants’ experience with the referendums in BC on STV and that they had voted “No” because they could not understand or explain STV.

Most of the participants strongly favoured local representation and want their MP to be responsive to all voters. There was concern about increasing the geographic size of this rural riding and discussion about whether that would mean that MPs would be more likely to be from the urban centers of Kelowna or Kamloops.

INTRODUCTION

The federal riding of North Okanagan-Shuswap is located in southern interior of BC. According to 2011 census figures, the riding population was 121,474 living in approximately 200 communities, ranging from settlements of less than 100 people to the City of Vernon (pop. 38,150). The main trading areas are the City of Vernon and the City of Salmon Arm (pop. 17,863).

Geographically, North Okanagan-Shuswap covers an area of 16,734 km² within two watersheds. The distance by road from Chase, in the west, to Craigellachie, in the east, is 107.5 km. It is 328 km from Seymour Arm, in the north, to Edgewood, in the southeast (partly by logging road). (see map **Appendix 1**)

The riding has one of the oldest demographics in Canada with investment/pension income being one of the largest sources of revenue. Other important sources of income include agriculture, natural resource industries, tourism and technology.

In 2015 there were 96,243 registered voters in the riding of whom 70,106 voted (a turnout of 72.84%).

Riding boundaries have not changed significantly since 1988. From 1993 to the present, our MPs have been from the Reform, Alliance or Conservative parties. The current MP is Mel Arnold (CPC). (see **Appendix 2** for 2011 and 2015 election results).

CONSULTATION PROCESS

In June 2016 the all-party Special Committee invited MPs to hold town halls in their ridings and report back to the committee so that the views of Canadians in all 338 electoral districts could inform the Committee's work. MP Arnold has not held a town hall or hosted a public discussion. In August, he sent a flyer asking for a mail-in response by September 30th to the following question:

“Before changing how we elect our MPs, should the government hold a referendum to get the approval of Canadians?”

The flyer did not refer to the work of the Special Committee or provide information about the online consultation. (see PDF of flyer –**Appendix 3**)

During the 2015 Federal election campaign, the issue of electoral reform was discussed at each of the 13 all-candidates public meetings in North Okanagan-Shuswap. Over 60% of the voters in the riding voted for a candidate who ran on a platform that included electoral reform. Given the level of interest in this topic during last year's election, the Association felt that it was important to let voters know about the current public consultation on electoral reform. The Association decided to host a series of Electoral Reform Dialogues to:

- inform the public about the work of the Committee and the opportunity for people to “Have Your Voice Heard”;
- have open discussions about electoral reform and forward the results to the Committee; and
- encourage participants to join the online consultation by completing the questionnaire before 8:59 PM PDT on October 7, 2016. (<https://survey-sondage-hoc.parl.gc.ca/TakeSurveyPage.aspx?s=0d6f61512d6a49108ec8370a88135ce7&tsid=2a27f44b76704e6d8f7df2e439a5aad&c=en-CA>)

We used the materials and format for “Host a Dialogue” provided on the government's website (<https://www.canada.ca/en/campaign/electoral-reform.html>). At each session we stated that:

- although the event was being hosted by the Association it was **not** a Liberal Party event;
- we were not advocating for any particular reform;
- we will be submitting the results of the sessions to the Special Committee and making the results public.

We handed out the post-event survey downloaded from the website with the following additional questions:

How do you feel about electronic voting?

How do you feel about online voting?

How do you feel about mandatory voting?

What other changes, if any to the methods and procedures we use to vote might you like to see?

(see **Appendix 4**)

We held a total of 15 dialogues using volunteer facilitators and note-takers:

Date	Location	#attendees	#surveys	Facilitator	Note-taker
Sept 19 5:00 PM	Salmon Arm -Derkaz residence	11	5	Cindy Derkaz	Sandra Stanley
Sept 19 7:00 PM	Vernon – Schubert Centre	47	30	Orest Holowach & Linda Elmore	Val Holowach
Sept 20 7:00 PM	Canoe – The Hive	14	10	Louise Wallace-Richmond	Karen Angove
Sept 20 7:00 PM	Salmon Arm – Urban Market	14	7	Tim Lavery	Joanell Clarke
Sept 22 10:00AM	Salmon Arm – Blue Canoe	25	20	Cindy Derkaz	Joanell Clarke
Sept 22 4:30 PM	Armstrong – Wild Oak Restaurant	9	8	Mike Fotheringham	Heywood MacDonnell
Sept 27 7:00 PM	Sorrento – Memorial Hall	14	9	Cindy Derkaz	Karen Angove
Sept 28 7:00 PM	Falkland – Seniors’ Hall	8	2	Cindy Derkaz	Karen Angove
Sept 27 &28	Vernon – Seaton Secondary School (3 classes of social studies students)	74	73	Eli Vlahos	Lucas Newman Maddy Moss Bridget Trainor
Oct 2 2:00 PM	Anglemont – Lakeview Community Centre	4	4	Carolyn Tayler	Bill Tayler
Oct 3 7:00 AM	Sicamous – Tim Horton’s	5	3	Cindy Derkaz	Don Paterson
Oct 3 10:00AM	Malakwa – Malakwa Cafe	12	5	Don Paterson	Cindy Derkaz
Oct 5 2:00 PM	Enderby – Cliff’s Bakery & Bistro	11	5	Don Paterson	Cindy Derkaz
Oct 5 6:30 PM	Blind Bay – Cedar Heights Community Centre	12	8	Don Paterson	Sandra Stanley
Oct 6 10:00AM	Chase – Sunshore Golf Course	12	5	Don Paterson	Karen Angove

(see map of locations **Appendix 5**)

Appendix 6 is a spreadsheet of all the survey results. In compiling the results, we noted that some respondents had rated each of the 5 guiding principles separately (1 to 5) resulting in some survey questions having several of the same number (e.g. all 5's) while other respondents had rated the principles in respect to each other (i.e. which principle they thought most important to least important – 1 to 5). As well respondents seem confused by 1 being the “most important” for the first 5 questions and 10 being “very helpful” when rating the gathering. This should be kept in mind when interpreting the spreadsheet.

Appendix 7 is a compilation of the notes taken at each of the dialogues.

RESULTS

The purpose of this submission is to report to the Committee what participants told us at the 15 dialogues. We are not analyzing the data collected nor making any recommendation as to the type of electoral reform preferred by North Okanagan-Shuswap residents. With the relatively small number of participants, all of whom “self-selected” by attending one or more sessions, and given the variances in presentation and facilitation, any recommendations coming from this process would be flawed.

Participants, for the most part, were pleased to have had the opportunity to learn more about the electoral reform process and to express their opinions without any particular point of view dominating the conversation. Many left the sessions saying that they were going to complete the online questionnaire before the October 7th deadline.

We found that participants were very engaged in the discussions and had come to learn more about electoral reform. They asked for “education, education, education”. In particular, there needs to be education about the differences between Alternative Voting, Proportional Representation and the Mixed Member Proportional options. We heard many concerns about complexity: “Keep it Simple” was a common comment.

We received 194 completed surveys: 121 from community dialogues and 73 from Seaton Secondary. Because the student responses represent 37.6% of our total responses, we have provided those responses separately.

Particulars from the completed surveys

1. Responses to the following survey question:

“Below are the five guiding principles which make up the foundation of our Canadian electoral reform process. When evaluating potential changes to our electoral system, how would you rank each principle? Where one (1) is most important and five (5) is least important.”

Community Dialogue Responses:

Five Guiding Principles											
Responses (all)		Effectiveness & Legitimacy:		Engagement		Accessibility & Inclusiveness:		Integrity:		Local Representation:	
Ranked 1		72	59.50%	59	48.80%	61	50.40%	86	71.10%	58	47.90%
Ranked 2		13	10.70%	30	24.80%	18	14.90%	7	5.80%	14	11.60%
Ranked 3		11	9.10%	10	8.30%	13	10.70%	13	10.70%	14	11.60%
Ranked 4		7	5.80%	10	8.30%	15	12.40%	1	0.80%	9	7.40%
Ranked 5		8	6.60%	9	7.40%	9	7.40%	9	7.40%	14	11.60%
Responses		111	91.70%	118	97.50%	116	95.90%	116	95.90%	109	90.10%
No response		10	8.30%	3	2.50%	5	4.10%	5	4.10%	12	9.90%
Total		121	100.00%	121	100.00%	121	100.00%	121	100.00%	121	100.00%

Seaton Secondary School, Vernon responses:

Five Guiding Principles											
Responses (all)		Effectiveness & Legitimacy:		Engagement		Accessibility & Inclusiveness:		Integrity:		Local Representation:	
Ranked 1		21	30.40%	19	26.80%	14	20.00%	17	24.30%	15	22.10%
Ranked 2		9	13.00%	17	23.90%	19	27.10%	10	14.30%	14	20.60%
Ranked 3		23	33.30%	26	36.60%	14	20.00%	17	24.30%	13	19.10%
Ranked 4		8	11.60%	7	9.90%	15	21.40%	15	21.40%	9	13.20%
Ranked 5		8	11.60%	2	2.80%	8	11.40%	11	15.70%	17	25.00%
Responses		69	100.00%	71	100.00%	70	100.00%	70	100.00%	68	100.00%
No response		4		2		3		3		5	
Total		73		73		73		73		73	

2. Common thread of comments in other survey questions:

Why was it important for you to join us today?

- My vote has never counted. I have never voted for a candidate who has won.
- I want a say in the change process.
- To encourage proportional representation: i.e. effectiveness and legitimacy.
- I want to learn more about the electoral systems choices.
- I want to hear others' opinions.
- I am frustrated with the current system.
- My conservative MP did not facilitate real consultation on this issue.
- To learn about alternative voting systems.
- Concern about declining turnout - especially under 30 years.

What idea did you hear today that you think could inspire more Canadians to participate in our democracy?

- Have online voting.
- Reduce voting age to 16 – would help young people get engaged.
- An improved voting system would make voters feel empowered and valued.
- Mandatory voting might help.
- The idea that your vote might count.
- Feeling that every vote counts.
- If we had some form of PR more vote would count and be heard, with our present system 60%+ are silenced which takes the incentive out of voting.
- Voting anywhere in Canada as long as you have identification to prove where you reside and who you are.

What does healthy democracy mean to you?

- Participation, discussion, representative accountability.
- Government that accurately and directly represents the interests of the people.
- Transparency and accountable and honest leaders.
- Having my voice heard.
- A fair accountable system without false majorities.
- When government reflects the majority.
- Inclusivity – especially of indigenous people, women, youth, seniors etc.
- That each vote counts.
- A country that feels well represented, that feels their needs are met and their voices are heard and that they are involved in decision making.
- The country can make collective decisions on big problems because there is consensus.
- Freedom to vote and have a say.
- Being represented in Ottawa by someone that I voted for. The party at least. Being more informed.

Do you have any additional thoughts that you would like to share with us?

- We need a referendum.
- MMP of some form is my personal choice.
- A national voting holiday.
- Give fair consideration to the present system.
- Concern about constant minority governments.
- More education and exposure of ideas. PR is a very complicated system. Too complicated for the average person to understand in a short time.
- Let's start thinking about future generations and not ourselves.
- Keep our current system.
- No referendum please.
- Proportional voting is hard to understand.

How do you feel about electronic voting?

- Similar comments to Online voting, below.

How do you feel about online voting?

- Yes, it would promote participation.
- Great as long as adequate controls are in place to ensure integrity of the system.
- No – too easy to abuse.
- Concerned about security.
- Yes, the younger generation does everything online.
- Yes, but must maintain paper ballots as well.

How do you feel about mandatory voting?

- Yes, as long as there was an option to say “none of the above”.
- No a financial penalty would punish the poor not the wealthy.
- No – negative feel to it.
- No – would not promote thoughtful voting.
- Does not assure educated votes.

What other changes, if any, to the methods and procedures we use to vote might you like to see?

- Voting over 2 or 3 days.
- Proportional representation.
- Randomize ballots so not alphabetical.
- Like STV system.
- Stay with FPTP.
- No referendum.
- Proportional voting. The present system has checks and balances and a paper trail after voting. I personally don't feel that our elected representatives had much, if any, power once they go to Ottawa.
- Option for both on-line and ballots.
- Like to see an end to attack ads.
- Limit amount spent on advertising.
- Have a better system for keeping registered voter list up to date.
- Better education about our government in school.
- Have advisors.
- Have proportional representation in the senate.
- We need to move to some form of PR, not sure if it whether MMP or STV.

*Comments from 80 High School Students from Seaton School in Vernon, BC

- Youth are very concerned about hacking on-line voting systems consequently many are not in favour of it.
- Youth have mixed feelings about mandatory voting - many are in favour of it.
- MPs should interact more with students in school.
- Students would like the voting system to be simple and inclusive.
- Students would like to see voting for more than one day.
- Students think there should be more education about politics in school.

3. A few ideas from the dialogues (see full Dialogue notes attached as Appendix 7):

- Instead of a referendum, the Committee should recommend that any vote in Parliament on electoral reform require a higher majority to pass: e.g. 70%. This would require more than just the Liberal Party to pass the reforms. Work towards consensus.
- There was a strong concern about lack of knowledge of the various voting system choices. The electorate needs more information so they can better understand the choices.
- Concern about the Senate - since senators have a part in creating legislation, there should also be gender and nation-wide representation and some believed they should be elected considering their legislative duties.
- Alternative voting system (ranked ballots or run-off) has appeal because it means that every member of parliament would have the support of 50% of the voters in the riding. It is simple to understand/explain and does not require changing the current riding size or changing the accountability of an MP to the local constituents.
- Accessibility to voting:
 - Find ways to enable marginalized, isolated and challenged individuals to vote.
 - Young people feel the current system only takes in the concerns of older people.
 - The current system is cumbersome, boring and there were long line-ups for voting – up to 2 hours.
 - Youth need more knowledge and education on elections/candidates and issues.
 - Voting at 16 years old “would help them while the information is still fresh.” We should lower the voting age to engage youth.

We hope that the Committee finds the information in this submission helpful: it provides a snapshot of the thoughts and concerns of some residents in our rural BC riding.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to make this submission and for its work on behalf of Canadians. We wish the Committee wisdom in its deliberations.

Respectfully submitted by North Okanagan-Shuswap Electoral District Association of the Liberal Party of Canada,

Cindy Derkaz, President

Karen Angove, Vice-President

Don Paterson, Regional Vice-President

LIST OF APPENDICES – note these documents can be accessed here by clicking on URL and copying into your browser to view and download:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/OB0ExkDXDtleUdWVJQ0hWT0FvRWs?usp=sharing>

Appendix 1 – Map of the North Okanagan Shuswap

Appendix 2 – North Okanagan Shuswap EDA 2011 and 2015 election results

Appendix 3 – Mailout flyer from MP Mel Arnold (CPC)

Appendix 4 – Sample of participant feedback form

Appendix 5 – Map of locations where dialogues were held

Appendix 6 - spreadsheet of all the survey results

Appendix 7 - compilation of the notes taken at each of the dialogues