

**Presentation to the
Special committee on Electoral Reform
September 19, 2016**

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REGINA – QU'APPELLE NDP RIDING ASSOCIATION

PRESENTATION to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

This presentation was developed through a process that included discussion by an ad hoc committee of the Executive of the Regina – Qu'Appelle Federal NDP Riding Association followed by input from the Executive Committee. We as an Executive own this perspective, and are answerable only to our membership base.

SUMMARY / RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The Regina Qu'Appelle NDP Executive recommends the institution of a "Mixed Member Proportional Representation voting system (MMPR) for it best meets the principles our association established and has the potential of meeting principles set out in the Special Committee on Election Reform Mandate Statement.
- 2) To strengthen MMPR we recommend the following:
 - a. Listed candidates must be determined provincially
 - b. That listed candidates must reflect gender, ethnic and minority diversity of the given province. (especially important considering the significant first nations population residing in the Regina Qu'Appelle Electoral District)
- 3) We recommend against instituting mandatory voting at this time, for much work needs to be done to provide alternative ways of casting a ballot thus enabling greater voter participation
- 4) We recommend that Elections Canada begin the process of instituting electronic and internet voting, while maintaining the present system of polls and paper ballots
- 5) We encourage the Committee to implement a "Proportional Representation" voting system (preferably MMPR) in time for the next federal election.

We expect the Special Committee on Electoral Reform to do its work in keeping with the Guiding Principles that frame its mandate. And further arrive at an electoral system that contributes to greater voter participation and makes every vote count to its maximum potential. It must also accurately replicate the proportion of vote achieved by each political party in each Province and Territory.

BACKGROUND

An understanding of the Regina Qu'Appelle Electoral District is essential to this presentation for it frames the perspective in the Regina Qu'Appelle NDP Riding Association. Our Electoral District runs approximately 120 Km west to east on its southern border and nearly 200 km north to south. It includes the north east quarter of the city of Regina. The population is composed of (72.5%) white, 21.1% aboriginal (11 reserves) and 3.2% other ethnic groups. There is a significant rural and farm population as one would expect by the geographic configuration of this Electoral District.

In the eight elections since 1988 where there was a Regina – Qu'Appelle Riding, only three of these eight elections resulted in a candidate receiving over 50% of the popular vote (1988, 2008 & 2011).

REGINA QU'APPELLE ELECTORAL DISTRICT						
	NDP	Liberal	Conservative	Green Party	Other	
1988	53.95*(E)	14.58	31.47 P.C.			
1993	34.43 (E)	31.11	22.56 reform 10.14 P.C.		1.76	
2000	41.30 (E)	17.98	40.72 C.A.			
2004	32.69	27.84	35.76 (E)	2.28	1.43	
2006	32.45	23.05	41.21 (E)	3.28		
2008	32.06	10.35	51.85*(E)	5.73		
2011	38.42	4.71	53.48*(E)	2.96	0.43	
2015	30.21	22.78	44.70	2.31		
*Note: In only three out of eight elections did a candidate receive over 50% of votes cast						
*Note: The Regina – Qu'Appelle electoral district did not exist in the 1997 election						

THE PRINCIPLES:

In discussions with the Executive of the Regina Qu'Appelle NDP Riding Association consensus was reached on three major points:

- 1) Canada must institute a proportional representation electoral system.
- 2) Every vote must count to its maximum potential
- 3) The adoption of a Proportional Representative system must be in place for the next election.

First- Past-The-Post (FPTP):

We are confident that the Committee is fully aware of the short-comings and presumed strengths of the First-Past-The-Post system of voting. It is in the opinion of the Regina Qu'Appelle NDP Executive that the strengths do not outweigh the benefits that would be gained by implementing a proportional representative system. This we believe is because the first principle must be paramount which is that **every vote must count to its maximum potential.**

Subsequently the arguments favouring this system need to be reviewed and set aside. The pros and cons of the present system were outlined in the Library of Parliament background paper: "Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: an Overview". The paper states the following advantages:

- " - - - favours the election of majority governments able to carry out a legislative agenda."
- - - is easy to understand - - -.
- - - results can be counted quickly.
- A popular government can be given a new mandate at the next election and one that loses public support can be ousted."

In response to each point:

- 1) Favours election of majority government able to carry out a legislative agenda.
Possibly a "proportional representative system may stop government from implementing policy that is designed to support a single narrow economic interest. It may also stop governments from ramming through legislation in Committee with no regard for Parliament and subsequently a proper review of the given legislation. Finally, if parties are forced to cooperate across the floor of parliament, there may be an improvement in parliamentary decorum and subsequently improve the public image of this most important institution. Canadians have experienced minority governments – and in that regard we have witnessed cooperation between parties and also lack of cooperation. It is our belief that the electorate would welcome governments that are less predisposed toward partisanship, to be replaced by an atmosphere of working together in the House and in Committee to arrive at effective legislation that reflects a range of points of view.
- 2) First- Past-The-Post is easy to understand
We are confident in the intellectual (literate) capacity of the electorate. Additionally, promotion of the new system in advance of the election and clear instruction, coupled with trained staff at the polls ought to reduce confusion to a minimum.
- 3) Results can be counted quickly.
This implies that a complex system may replace FPTP. If the Special Committee chooses "Mix Member Proportional Representation" system rather than a "Single Transferable Vote" system (ranked balloting), complexity is reduced.
- 4) A popular government can be given a new mandate at the next election and one that loses public support can be ousted." Another way of putting this observation is that it may reduce tendency of voters to stampede toward an assumed conclusion without consideration of what the given party offers.

The literature is quite clear on the weaknesses of FPTP including a high level of disproportionality, tendency toward regionality, and mitigation against aboriginal and minority candidates being nominated and subsequently elected.

Especially since the Regina – Qu'Appelle Electoral District has a 21.1% aboriginal population, we fully support a system that provides the best opportunity for that community to have a voice in parliament.

This leads our Riding Association to support the position expressed in the 2004 Law Reform Commission which recommends a mixed member proportional system.

This review clearly, shows that a “proportional representative system” would be superior to the FPTP system. It though requires the Special Committee on Electoral Reform to have trust in the electorate.

ALTERNATIVE VOTING SYSTEMS:

Proportional Representation:

In discussing options for electoral reform, and for clarity we will simply refer to two basic systems. We acknowledge that there is a complexity and considerable variation to these options. Subsequently we will refer only to:

- Single Transferable (ranked ballot) proportional representation system
AND
- Mixed member proportional representation

From a cursory review of commentaries on this subject, it would appear that under a:

- Single Transferable / ranked ballot
 - o There is a tendency to believe that it would help the “centrist” party.
A related issue is whether the voter would be required to rank all candidates or is allowed to only mark their preferred choice if they so desire. In our view, should the Committee choose this option we recommend that the voter be allowed to choose whether they want to rank only one, or some or all of the Candidates.
- Mixed member:
 - o Is considered to be the option that maximizes the principle of every vote counting
 - o Generally allows voters to choose the candidate that they feel best represents their interests and as well pick their party of choice.

This method is accepted as the best option as expressed in the Law Reform Commission Report as follows:

“- - - adding an element of proportionality to Canada’s electoral system, as inspired by the systems currently used in Scotland, and Wales, would be the most appropriate model for adoption. This system would even out the regional imbalances in party caucuses produced by our first-past-the-post system. It would produce highly proportional results, - - -”. (Page 126, Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada, Law Commission of Canada, 2004)

Critical points we wish to emphasize:

- 1) We concur that a proportional representation system would be an improvement over the “first past the post system”
- 2) Mixed membership system tends to best represent the principle: “every vote counts to its maximum potential”
- 3) A mixed member proportional system ought to represent and as close as possible match the proportion of votes cast for a given political party
- 4) That a mixed member Proportional Representation system must include a provincial method where each party determines its candidate list. For emphasis, we believe that region / province can best determine the listed candidates.

A corollary to #4: the regional / provincial representatives list ought to acknowledge gender balance, First Nations and visible minorities, etc. This is a particularly sensitive issue in the Regina Qu’Appelle Electoral District that encompasses 11 reserves and a sizable urban First Nations population (21.1% of the Regina Qu’Appelle Electoral District).

- 5) Some have suggested that in applying a “mixed member proportional representative” system to 2015 election numbers the centrist party would gain the greatest benefit at the expense of the left and right of the political spectrum. (Electoral reform: Which party would benefit most”, Eric Grenier, CBC News Dec3, 2014) And that when 2015 election results are applied to a ranked ballot system there would be no gains in proportionality. These observations though may not take into consideration that the political and electoral environment will have changed. Subsequently one ought not to put too much credence in such analysis.

Mandatory voting:

It appears from the Australian experience that mandatory voting increases voter participation. It also may encourage members of certain economic / social classes to participate. We though believe that such a step must be preceded by increasing voter accessibility. This means that alternative methods of voting need to be put in place before mandatory voting is legislated.

Electronic and internet voting:

The Regina – Qu’Appelle NDP Executive would be predisposed toward electronic and internet forms of voting as it may encourage greater participation of youth. It also may assist in increasing participation among those that are less mobile or isolated. We though believe that it remains important that the present method of exercising our vote (a physical poll location and paper ballot) must remain for the present with electronic forms of voting as an option.

Referendum:

There has been a call for a referendum on electoral reform. This call has come from the not only the Conservative Party but also the right-leaning think tank - Fraser Institute (Electoral reform in Canada requires a referendum, Dec 11, 2015). The Regina Qu’Appelle NDP Executive does not favour holding a referendum for the following reasons:

- 1) Voters need to experience the alternate system that has been adopted.

- 2) Those opposing electoral reform are already attempting to derail the move to a more representative system through a confused range of arguments, and misinformation.
- 3) The Liberal Party was clear of its intentions during 2015 the election.
- 4) The NDP and the Green Party are on the record as supporting changes to our electoral system to more accurately reflect the intentions of the voters.
- 5) The Law Reform Commission report states that there is no constitutional requirement, (page 68, Voting Counts: Electoral Reform for Canada, Law Commission of Canada, 2004) subsequently, our message is for the Special Committee on Electoral Reform "Get it done".

Thank you for the privilege of presenting to you today.

Electoral reform can bring Canada's voting system into the 21st Century and is in line with the changing times we are in.

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