

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Brief submitted by : Karl Taliesin
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I was pleased to attend your consultation on September 20 and greatly appreciated the opportunity to speak. In 2 minutes there was no way to say or even summarize all I wanted to communicate. Please accept this letter as a far better summary of my speaking points. I am a poor public speaker but I can write more effectively.

I have so many ideas and suggestions about the ERRE I would like to message you many things but I feel I am just a single person not an organization. I like to research and learn but I am not a professor or academic about political science. Although I have many things to say what can I really add that Fair Vote Canada has not already contributed? **I strongly favour any system that eliminated the problem of wasted votes and makes a difference to increase voter turnout.**

Voter turnout matters. Our problem is not that there is voter fraud where voters are making more than 1 ballot – it is that there are eligible voters not voting at all. We need to increase voter participation. Which is a multi-faceted problem but is primarily linked to poverty and lack of accountability as discussed many times in the meeting by citizens and experts. In the meeting I pointed out that recognizing the barriers and challenges faced by a person with disabilities is an intellectual exercise that you must also do when evaluating our electoral system. That when increasing voter turnout is in everyone's best interest why is the national trend going down – it is because citizens are facing [barriers](#) and [challenges](#) to having good ethical and accountable political representation. I do like reading results from other countries that have proportional representation that their voter turnout is much better than our own, not to say other countries have it perfect because I'm sure there are flaws in other electoral systems too but that is to be learned from and a challenge to you to improve upon when you put forth your recommendations.

Accountability is something that can be addressed by your committee in the details of a new election system. Practical experience with politicians shows they are usually good people getting elected who want to do good in Ottawa, but the Party politics really skews how they get anything done. I think that any recommendation you put forward should include a method for recall a member of parliament, and a method for recall of senators, and for popular initiatives, and a better defined law for plebiscite and referendums. These things were all in my list of electoral changes and good things a government can do to be accountable to its citizens and then I was surprised when I found that this information was [already prepared for parliament in 1993](#).

I have heard in the meeting that several people mentioned that kids and schools need to learn how voting works. But the real problem is that they DO understand our system and know it to be dysfunctional - any system that has 35-40% of popular vote receive

more than 50% of the seats in parliament and then form a government that has 100% of the power is messed up.

The [news media](#) is rarely kind to government when there are problems that can be reported and the [recent reports from Canada Revenue Agency](#) are just the latest of a long line of evidence of lack of accountability that stretches from the top politicians to the civil servants.

It is even more galling that when fraud is found that there is no immediate repercussions and in the case of the federal RoboCall scandal there [was no justice](#). My fellow Winnipeggers were victims of that fraud and there was no riding that had a by-election to resolve that problem, and no MP had to answer for the fraud the Conservative Party conducted in their riding, and the judge who finally [years later declared the Conservative Party to be at fault](#) imposed no penalties on the party itself. I think that any recommendation you put forward should strengthen the power of Elections Canada to re-do an election when needed and there should have been immediate by-elections once fraud was confirmed; Then the justice system with lawyers and judges can take their usually long long time to decide what charges get placed on organizations. The RCMP should have been front and centre with Elections Canada on this fraud and they were not – we need an electoral system that given them that power to investigate and press charges. A supporter of the Conservative Party of Canada would be ashamed to be involved with this lack of accountability when their party is trying to run an election on the basis of trust and accountability and pointing to the failures of the previous government actions.

Wasted votes matter. This is the primary feeling among the public that their voice is not represented in parliament. For example in my riding of Winnipeg Centre that has thousands of Conservative Party supporters they have never elected a Conservative candidate in the riding they do feel that their interests are not given voice in the government. Even if in the past where the CPC was government their member of parliament was NDP and does not represent their voices in parliament. Currently the Liberals are in government and the Conservative supports have no voice in parliament again, even when their party sits as official opposition. I have voted in every election I was eligible for since I turned 18 and my vote has never counted. So when I support a party or candidate that does not win, my interests and my values are not of any importance to the government – because my MP is not obligated to listen without some rules about popular initiatives I mentioned above, nor worried that I can vote them out of office because they have the plurality of supporters in the last election and no method of recall. Canada is not currently a country that uses any principles of direct democracy and that is a weakness of our system.

Another consideration of wasted votes is the problem with swing ridings and safe ridings. In the current FPTP system a riding can be dominated by a party to the exclusion of the other people in that riding who know their votes will never outweigh the majority in that riding making their vote ineffective. This is disenfranchising our own citizens and demoralizing to our public confidence in the legitimacy of government.

Voting methods have many options. I saw on your website you had narrowed down to 5 main selections, First Past the Post, Alternative Vote, Mixed Member Proportional,

Open or Closed List Proportional Representation, and Single Transferable Vote. I am sure you are working on deciding what factors have the most importance before making your recommendations. I strongly favour Open List Proportional Representation or the Single Transferable Vote. Because they have the most simple ballot for voters. The Canadian people are smart enough to know how voting works in any new system but the masses will want to know it is kept short and simple.

I support a proportional voting method that focuses on: Keep the ballot simple, show all candidate choices, and have simplistic instructions for voters how to use it – to make 1 mark or to rank choices 1,2,3,etc. I support a proportional system that adds value to each province, especially the western provinces I am biased towards my own region, that the provincial representation must be balanced against the huge population core of Canada in Ontario and Quebec. I support a proportional system that considers the population imbalance between urban and rural and must allow for more rural representation based on geographic coverage not just population density.

I do not prefer the MMP ballot as simple because it does look like 2 votes for 1 person and although I understand it the public masses may not and I like its proportional effects but I don't know how you can develop it for the 2 classes of Members of Parliament to be beholden to the electors – there must always be accountability.

I do not like FPTP because it creates a false majority result, it is a plurality not a majority and that makes the country weak when the government that holds 100 percent of the power only has support from 35-40% of voters and further that is only approx 25% of the total registered electors – FPTP must go away because a country run by 25% of the population will always have to take actions in the face of an opposition that is the other 75%.

I think Alternative Vote is marginally better than FPTP but still has the serious problem of false majority in representation.

Referendum on the voting system is a topic that many people feel strongly about. I was previously feeling unsure about if I wanted a referendum or not, until I read a document ([linked here](#)) showing some pros and cons, and now I strongly agree that Referendum is not needed. Your committee represents the public interest in this matter and its members have been chosen to be representative of the political parties and their supporters, so your committee's recommendation is representative of the public. Although I also still feel the nationwide consultations you are currently doing are not enough to legitimize the lack of referendum and there is more citizen committees and stakeholders to consult. A good sentiment is that "the cure for ills of democracy is more democracy."([referenced here](#)) This country can and has made huge decisions about its future without referendum, such as the Charter of Rights & Freedoms.

In the meeting was mentioned the idea of a test trial. There is an idea I have not read before and a great idea. A proper test trial in an upcoming by-election would be a great example to demonstrate a new electoral system to the government and to the public.

To sum it all up: **Your committee has the opportunity to not just choose a new voting method but also to make recommendations that affect the entire electoral**

system. I urge you to use this process to bring real meaningful change to Canadian politics.

References:

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Thank you,

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