

Dear Committee

The conversation about Electoral Reform in the House of Commons has limited itself in an important way. Any conversation about reforming the method of election in the House of Commons or the Senate should be inclusive of both chambers. Let me elaborate.

Typically electoral reform is proposed for three reasons:

Canadians are dis-engaging from the political process as seen by a decreasing voter turnout rate.

The existing system does not adequately represent Canadians values, often demonstrated by a comparison of popular support for a party vs the percentage of seats in the House of Commons.

With respect to the Senate in particular (but also plausibly the office of the Prime Minister) it is viewed as undemocratic to have that position selected by means other than election by the people.

The first, that is improving voter turnout, may be the simplest to resolve and I believe you have already heard a number of solutions, but let me offer a couple:

A tax receipt that could be filled with an individual's tax return for a rebate could be issued to all voters. Knowing first time voting is important and highly indicative of future voting, the rebate could be adjusted to pay first time voters ~\$100, and repeat voters \$25. If we agree voting is a public good perhaps we should pay for it. (*The value of the rebate is arbitrary and could be adjusted to maximize the effectiveness and minimize the cost*)

Fraud would be simple to monitor as the total votes cast in an electoral district could be easily compared to the total number of receipts issued. The cost of this scheme would not be disproportionate to the tax rebates available for political donations and it would have the benefit of being a mildly progressive addition to the tax code (that is people of lower income would benefit most).

Providing a statutory holiday, or capping the work day at 4 hours would provide everyone with time to vote. The same is true for extending the voting period to two days, or placing it on the weekend.

The second concern, that of a disconnect between actual representation and members in the House of Commons is a result of the tension between representative priorities, and an acceptance of the legitimacy of the "party" system.

In my view there are two broad competing needs for representation. First a basic premise of democracy is that each individual should be treated equally, and therefore the House of Commons should precisely reflect the proportional vote. The second premise we hold in Canada is that each region (I will not delve into the complexity of what is a region) merits an equal voice. Solving the balance between these two needs appears to be the focus of this committees work, and it is here that ignoring the Senate does the conversation a dis-service. In my view it is accepted that a Proportional Representation system approximates the first form of representation most accurately (outside of continual referendums) and a FPTP system represents regions best. Therefore if one chamber is elected by one method (PR), the other chamber ought to be elected by the other method (FPTP). There is no need to impose both methods, or a mixed method in a single chamber (Senate or House of Commons). In our case, it may be simplest to elect the House of Commons on a PR basis and the Senate on a FPTP basis as this would negate the need

for substantive constitutional reform. (if the senate election is held nationwide, there would be no strength to existing senators arguments to stay in office, or a PM's desire to appoint anyone else)

I will pause here to observe that this conversation only has merit if the party system is accepted as 100% legitimate, it seems to me there is little room for an independent voice in a Proportionally Representative system and this is a loss that should be very carefully weighted. Further, the criticism of the existing system assumes all votes are cast by party lines and no consideration has been given to the individual standing for election. This is an enormous assumption given the size of your own pay, I would like to think that electors put some thought into selecting you to represent us, or you have no legitimacy to act independently. Finally moving to a PR system makes it impossible for a riding to hold a single individual to account for any positive or negative action.

I believe the public (for better or worse) has developed an expectation for the House of Commons to function as a Proportionally Representative chamber. In order to balance that chamber, I would argue for an elected Senate on a First-Past-The-Post basis. This is not without challenges but if reform must be pursued, I believe this would be the most effective.

Notwithstanding electoral reform, there are many actions to be taken to improve electoral engagement which should be implemented immediately.

Sincerely

-Sasha Harpe