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Brief submitted by:

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As a former Member of Parliament, one who vigorously supported the Liberal Party's initiative to reform our electoral system – one that truly began at the grass roots of the Party – I write you offering a different perspective.

You have already heard the testimony from many witnesses, received written submissions from others and reflected upon the results of the many town halls conducted across the country. I will, therefore, not reiterate the multiple reasons why some model of proportional representation, whose outcome causes the actual seats held by a Party in the House of Commons to reflect better the percentage of votes received by that Party throughout the country, would better serve the Canadian electorate.

Instead, I simply want to explain to you what I will call my “epiphany moment” respecting the issue of electoral reform.

In 2006, when I first decided to seek the nomination for my Party in Guelph, many people who talked to me about electoral reform and proportional representation immediately approached me. People recommending electoral reform didn't exactly overwhelm me but I was encouraged to read more about it. I did so, but candidly, it was not a priority for me given the state of the economy and eventual recession of 2008. After my election, I welcomed many contingents of people from all political stripes who attended to either my office in Guelph or my office in Ottawa to discuss electoral reform. For the most part, the proposition of electoral reform was being made from people from parties who, while having wonderful ideas, were rarely able to translate those ideas into seats in the House. The proposition of a mixed member proportion model frightened me, envisioning so many parties that the conduct of Parliament and even the ability to find common ground through coalitions would become unruly. This caused me to examine other models that I began to call “proportional representation – lite”. Numerous models were discussed in many of our smaller, policy caucus meetings, which eventually led to the inclusion of electoral reform as part of our democratic reform motion successfully brought before our convention in Montreal.

I do not propose through this correspondence to recommend a model. That is something for the Committee to examine and thereafter, for Parliament to decide. I would only like to bring the following to your attention.

During a meeting in my office in Guelph, which was attended by many people from all political parties, the usual debate about electoral reform, proportional representation, preferential ballot etc. ensued. At one point a good friend and member of the Green Party said to me, “Frank, we really like you as our MP and while you may be doing a good job you do not represent me and my opinions”. This statement was not intended to be hurtful – it came from a fellow who has no fibre in his being to be hurtful towards anyone - nor did it come from any sense of

malice. It did, however, come from his heart and mind and that is how it was received. I paused for what seemed to be quite a while and thought about the very low margin with which I won my first election in 2008 and then modestly higher margin in 2011. Each time following those two elections, I proudly went to Ottawa as the representative from Guelph. I very quickly dawned an attitude that I was speaking for virtually everyone in my community. Yes there were issues whose solutions were shared by more than one Party, sometimes a majority in the House, but I came to feel, wrongfully or rightfully, that every time I spoke in the House, or acted, I was speaking or voting on behalf of “everyone” in my community. In that room on that day, my friend made me realize that I was not.

I can assure you that my constituency office was conducted in a non-partisan way where everyone from every party stripe was welcome. People from all parties came to my office and expressed their appreciation that I seemed to get beyond politics in my efforts on their behalf. Notwithstanding, I became concerned by the fact that I did not represent everyone’s opinion when I went into the House of Commons and spoke. I worried about the voice of those constituents who’s opinion I did not share being heard in the House notwithstanding my constant efforts to keep informed of where people stood on issues we confronted.

Too often, MP’s become “territorial” – protective – of the community which they represent and sometimes offended when other MPs outside our own riding, are contacted by people in our own riding and even unnecessarily threatened when MPs from other parties come into their riding.

This may have been only my experience among the 308 MPs that comprised the House of Commons until 2011, though I suspect not.

It was after a full assessment of those thoughts, feelings and concerns that I decided to support those who were seeking electoral reform – a model that would better accommodate a fulsome representation of people from all political persuasions within the same riding so that more voices could be heard and be counted.

I, therefore, encourage your deliberations in choosing the best electoral model that accommodates our regional diversity and allows everyone’s vote to count.