

Ottawa, Ontario  
September 13, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform  
House of Commons

I am writing the Special Committee on Electoral Reform for several reasons. As a resident in the riding of Ottawa-Vanier, with the recent death of Mauril Bélanger, the opportunity to participate in a town hall discussion on electoral reform is not open to me. Furthermore, I have had a long-standing interest in political issues and the functioning of Canadian politics. For example, in 1991, I submitted to the Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee a response to the Government of Canada Proposals for Constitutional Change: *Shaping Canada's Future Together*. Some of the views which I expressed then are still pertinent to the work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. An extract from that submission is attached.

Four of the issues which the Special Committee is being asked to consider were addressed by my earlier submission, namely:

- 1) Effectiveness and legitimacy: that the proposed measure would increase public confidence among Canadians that their democratic will, as expressed by their votes, will be fairly translated and that the proposed measure reduces distortion and strengthens the link between voter intention and the election of representatives;
- 2) Engagement: that the proposed measure would encourage voting and participation in the democratic process, foster greater civility and collaboration in politics, enhance social cohesion and offer opportunities for inclusion of underrepresented groups in the political process;
- 3) Accessibility and inclusiveness: that the proposed measure would avoid undue complexity in the voting process, while respecting the other principles, and that it would support access by all eligible voters regardless of physical or social condition;
- 5) Local representation: that the proposed measure would ensure accountability and recognize the value that Canadians attach to community, to Members of Parliament understanding local conditions and advancing local needs at the national level, and to having access to Members of Parliament to facilitate resolution of their concerns and participation in the democratic process.

As I commented before, there is a need to “educate the public as to the many real strengths of our political system.” The importance of increasing the knowledge and understanding of the Canadian electorate of the parliamentary system, along with the importance of voting in elections, can not be stressed enough.

My comments in 1991 were on a broader set of constitutional and electoral issues and included a discussion of the future of the Senate, with the suggestion of moving Senate seats into the House of Commons. While the role of the Senate continues to be an issue of public debate, I recognize that Senate reform is somewhat beyond the mandate of this Special Committee.

As I previously noted, “the vagaries of constituency / winner-take-all elections mean that a party can come to power without substantial representation from one or more regions.” While constituencies should be the base for elections in order to maintain the link and accountability between the voter and elected representatives, I would suggest that in order to acknowledge the popular vote obtained by respective parties, additional seats, allocated by regions, would be distributed to parties reflecting the popular vote which they received. As I said earlier:

“It might be desirable for these members to be chosen from among the defeated candidates for constituencies in each successive general election. This would enable the parties to enjoy the benefit of having in the caucuses, and cabinets, those candidates who have campaigned well, and have shown their merit as potential parliamentarians, although in a losing cause. More first-rate candidates would be willing to contest ridings in which their parties had little or no chance of winning. This, in turn, would greatly improve the choices available to the voter. Such an improvement, both in the quality of regional representation and in the pool of talent available to the respective parties, might have enabled Canada to find wise and fair solutions to many of the problems which trouble us today.”

To address the criticism that a plethora of parties could be elected, creating unstable government, a minimum level of electoral support might be required. Thus, for example, parties must have received at least five percent of the popular vote in order to have access to the additional seats.

I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate on electoral reform in Canada and extend my best wishes to members of the Special Committee in your deliberations.

Sincerely

Richard Hooe Macy

## Attachment

Extract from Response to Government of Canada Proposals for Constitutional Change:  
*Shaping Canada's Future Together*, by Richard Hooe Macy

### 8. House of Commons

I have no sympathy for the opinion that our parliamentary system is “too partisan” and too heavily disposed toward “conflict, rather than toward cooperation.” The debate in the House of Commons, particularly in Question Period, is one of the great sources of strength of our system. The demand to replace it with plebiscites and referenda is both ill-informed and asinine.

I have no objection to efforts to encourage chivalrous behaviour and to enforce parliamentary decorum. However, Canadians must resolutely reject any attempt to Americanize the Canadian parliamentary system. Even the most insignificant changes should be examined. Instead of pandering to public ignorance, it would seem better to educate the public as to the many real strengths of our political system.

#### A Regional Voice in the Commons

Since the real power is in the Commons, why not have the elected, effective and equitable regional voice in the Commons? It is desirable to have a strong regional voice present in the caucus and the cabinet of the governing party and in the caucus and shadow cabinet of the opposing parties. However, the vagaries of constituency / winner-take-all elections mean that a party can come to power without substantial representation from one or more regions.

#### Proportional Representation in the House of Commons

One possible solution would be to abolish the Senate and move the Senate seats in to the Commons, allocate them by regions, and distribute them according to proportional representation (i.e.: the percentage of popular votes garnered by the respective parties) between those parties which obtain 5% or more of the vote in a given region. It might be desirable for these members to be chosen from among the defeated candidates for constituencies in each successive general election. This would enable the parties to enjoy the benefit of having in the caucuses, and cabinets, those candidates who have campaigned well, and have shown their merit as potential parliamentarians, although in a losing cause. More first-rate candidates would be willing to contest ridings in which their parties had little or no chance of winning. This, in turn, would greatly improve the choices available to the voter. Such an improvement, both in the quality of regional representation and in the pool of talent available to the respective parties, might have

enabled Canada to find wise and fair solutions to many of the problems which trouble us today. There is a long list of outstanding Canadians who, under such a system, would have been allowed to play their proper role in influencing policy and events for the better.

I see the region as a useful way of dividing the commons seats to be elected by proportional representation. I would prefer that rep by pop governed the setting of the boundaries of these regions,...

One way to divide the country along regional lines would be to make Ontario and Québec regions in their own right, the Atlantic provinces as another region, Manitoba and Saskatchewan as another region, Alberta and British Columbia as another region, and Yukon and the Northwest Territories (and now Nunavut) as the final region. The apportionment of seats would have to be determined in the general round of constitutional horse-trading, but I assume that it would begin that with the assumption that the number of representatives from Ontario and Québec would remain the same as in the Senate, but that the number of representatives from other regions would be increased in accord with their modern importance to Canada and/or their perceived need for stronger voices at the centre of power.