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Submission to the
Electoral Reform Committee
of the House of Commons

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I raise here one voting issue that I feel needs to be addressed by electoral reform, and, as a dual Canadian-New Zealand citizen, I provide several suggestions on improving the New Zealand Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) system for Canada.

One of the primary faults with our current system is:

> I want to vote for A, but I am going to vote for B because I am afraid if I do not, C will win.

This type of "strategic" voting is in my mind highly undesirable. I strongly believe we should be voting *for* a candidate, not *against* another candidate. In addition, the fact that many people realize that if they vote for their preferred candidate then their vote will be lost and their voice unheard, is one contributor to the low level of citizen participation in the voting process. We should have a system that minimizes strategic voting. There are many systems, some proportional some not, that do so; I urge the committee to recommend such a system.

I am in favour of some sort of proportional system for many of the reasons others have put forward including greater cooperation among political parties to govern, broader representation of the diverse views of Canadians, and the fact that voters will know that their vote has effect. Since the MMP scheme used by New Zealand is one of the primary models being looked at closely, I wish to comment on several aspects of that system.

I am a dual Canadian-New Zealand citizen, having lived in New Zealand from 1998-2003 and voted there under their MMP system. This system is far better than first past the post, but, like all systems, it has some problems. I list here three problems with that system and suggestions on how those problems could be overcome by changes to it.

1. *New Zealand's MMP still uses first past the post to elect local MPs.*

   The issue of which party forms the government is not at all determined by the election of local MPs under New Zealand's MMP. This fact reduces some of the need for strategic voting, however, it is still true that strategic voting takes place in the election of local MPs because of first past the post.

   The way to correct this problem in the election of local MPs is to use a system which gathers more information than first past the post and reduces strategic voting. For example, either a ranked ballot with an "alternative vote" scheme, or "approval voting," where each voter simply indicates *all* of the candidates whom they approve with the person with the highest approval rating being elected.

2. *In New Zealand the parties draw up the "lists" from which candidates are selected to sit as "list MPs," based on the outcome of the "party vote" in the election, and these lists may contain people who are not running in a local riding.*

   This, in my opinion, has two major flaws. First, I think no one should be on the list who is not already running for office in a local constituency. Second, I think the parties

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should not draw up the list, but rather that the candidates used to fill list seats should be those who lost in their local ridings but received the most support. Canadians value the "localness" of our MPs and I believe would object to a system where MPs were not closely associated with a particular riding or region. Similarly, I think Canadians would object to the aspect of New Zealand's system where voters have no control over the candidates for whom they are effectively voting with their "party vote." Selecting list MPs from the best losers in the ridings ensures that all members of parliament have personal legitimacy.

Such a scheme simply requires a reasonable way of comparing the performance of two losing candidates from the same party in different ridings.

3. *New Zealand did not consider what happens when a list seat MP wishes, after the election, to switch parties or is kicked out of their party, until after it happened.*

   Their after-the-fact solution to this problem was not in my opinion adequate. If list MPs (those awarded seats from the party vote, not from winning a riding) are selected from a party-drawn up list, then their only legitimacy from the MMP election is that they represent that particular party. If they then leave that party or are kicked out, they have lost all legitimacy and should be required to immediately resign their seat. If, however, the list candidates are chosen as the "best losers" in various ridings, then they have some personal legitimacy to remain in parliament, since they have a mandate as an individual having received significant support during the election. Of course you also have to decide whether list seat vacancies are filled. In New Zealand they filled them from the next person that was on the list. However, this is not good because it allows for ridiculous party "games" where they coax or throw people out in order to get someone further down the list into parliament who is now more attractive to the party establishment than the previous person. I leave this for the committee to consider carefully if they suggest an MMP system, but I note that most of the problem here is eliminated if the list MPs are selected by the voters rather than the parties.

In closing, I recommend:

- Choosing a voting system that reduces or eliminates strategic voting. This should help motivate people to be involved in the election process, since they are able to express their true preferences without fear of undesirable consequences.

- Choosing a proportional representation system.

- If a system similar to New Zealand's MMP is recommended, then

    - Local MPs should be elected by a system other than first past the post.
    - Lists should be dictated by the voters and not the parties, for example by selecting list MPs from the best losers in the riding contests.
    - The committee should carefully consider rules regarding legitimacy of MPs who are elected as list MPs but then change party affiliation.

These measures within an MMP system would help assure legitimacy of MPs and keep all MPs closely associated with local ridings.