

Brief to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Barnaby Clunie, Oakville, ON

October 7, 2016

My parents raised me to be a voter. I remember being taken to the polling station every election and watching my mother and father disappear behind the screen to mark the magic paper. Voting was a somber, adult, responsible thing to do, and I have voted in every election since I turned 18.

Lately, however, when I vote I find that I am always holding my nose and voting for the least worst option. I bring my kids to the polling station, but I wonder if they can sense my dissatisfaction, my disillusionment with the process. I believe that political systems are in crisis globally, as evidenced by troubling voter behaviour that seeks to punish the system as a whole, rather than vote on issues. There is a general sense that the system is unresponsive to the needs of the electorate; that promised change never comes.

Changing the Canadian electoral system will not stem this tide of pessimism and mistrust all by itself, but it will be a positive step forward. It will re-empower voters by enabling them to vote with their conscience, rather than out of fear for the alternatives. If the system remains the same, I believe the sense of civic duty that keeps many of us voting despite the base unfairness of the system will continue to wane. The status quo may be good for political parties who are able to leverage the mistrust and fear, but it will be very bad for the rest of us.

I am heartened by the non-partisan approach the Government has taken towards this issue, and by the fact that most in the house ran on a platform of electoral reform. For the first time in a long time, I am hopeful that a Government initiative will produce something of lasting value for Canada.

This committee and the House have been empowered to make a change. You are carefully considering the options, collecting the opinions of Canadians, and you will be making a reasoned and courageous recommendation to the House, which I expect will then enact the changes so that our democracy remains healthy and strong.

I look forward to my next federal election, and to sharing a revived democratic spirit with my kids.