

Electoral Reform Speech to the Special Committee  
Sept 28/16 Vancouver, B.C.

My name is Ellen Woodsworth I am a former Vancouver City Councillor and Chairperson of Women Transforming Cities. I am a cousin of Grace MacInnes who in the 60's was the only woman MP in the House of Commons. I chained myself in the House of Commons in 1970 with other members of the Abortion Caravan to call for abortion on demand because women did not have free access to either abortion or birth control and were not being heard by the government because women were not in government. Today there are issues that have not been heard by a government that does not equitably represent them. The voices of the murdered and missing first nations women are only now being heard. There is a creeping disillusionment in this country since the Federal election that people will not be heard on a number of commitments.

I am pleased today the government representing all parties is listening to citizens about the current undemocratic electoral system. I am very concerned that there are so few voices of women being heard at these hearings. I am concerned that aboriginal, lesbian, trans, immigrant, refugee, young and older women, from all cultures and races are not being encouraged to attend these or special hearings. They are the ones bearing the brunt of the economic & housing crisis & Climate Change. Their voices need to be reflected.

Of the 62 witnesses who appeared before the Special

Committee this summer just 13 were women. In almost half of all meetings, fully 100 percent of the witnesses have been men. At one point, the committee convened seven meetings in a row without hearing from a single female witness. This committee is meeting during the day and has no childcare available. I understand in Ottawa there was a special meeting convened for women. Only 25% of this committee are women.

Nancy Peckford from Equal Voices stated "Recognizing Canada's first- past- the- post system has been woefully imperfect in terms of the electoral outcomes it has shaped for women who remain chronically and severely under-represented, the committee must be much more thoughtful about who precisely they hear from,"

Women currently comprise 26 percent of federal Members of Parliament. Only three of Canada's 13 premiers are women and Canada ranks 64th internationally for women's representation in national Parliaments.

I support the following recommendations of Equal Voice

- Changes to the federal nomination process - not just the voting system - be evaluated and implemented;
- On-going review of retention issues and political culture to increase the representation of women in Canada; and
- Consideration of the different effects on the number of women elected and the amount women can do to address issues that disproportionately affect women.

I also support Proportional Representation. The party that get 40% of the vote should have % 40 of the seats. The form that takes must ensure equitable representation of the diverse population of women who are over 50% of the population.

Canada has a tremendous opportunity to regain its number one standing in the world for women by thoroughly examining and recommending an electoral system which would ensure that the full population of Canadians are supported to vote, to campaign, to run for office and to be equitably represented in candidates in all parties running in electable ridings and in the House of Commons.

**Ellen Woodsworth**