

Electoral Reform Submission to ERRE

Date of meeting: Sept. 19, 2016

Place: Moses Rittenhouse Library, 4080 John Charles Blvd. in Vineland, ON

Riding: Niagara West

Participants: 15 voters

The focus of the meeting was to learn more about alternative types of electoral systems and to discuss six of the 'dialogue topics' suggested by the ERRE, submitting the following summary for the Committee's consideration. Note it may contain apparent contradictions but an effort was made to include each participant's opinions and combine ideas where appropriate.

1. Regarding ideas to help Canadians feel more involved and interested in democracy:
 - i. find ways to engage youth who feel disconnected
 - ii. link success in youth lives to better understanding of our political system by increasing formal education in this area taught by teachers well educated in the topic.
 - iii. decrease control over MPs by 'party central'
 - iv. find ways to empower voters- their vote matters
 - v. decrease cynicism by making voters feel that who they choose has 'a chance of winning'
 - vi. media focus on issues, not distraction tactics
 - vii. a system of proportional representation would make people feel better represented
 - viii. reward citizens for voting through a tax credit or penalize them with a penalty for not voting

The overwhelming tactic that was determined would have the most benefit regarded better educating youth, formally, about the importance of government.

2. Regarding whether the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively:
 - i. clearly not as there is too much lobbying and MPs are being whipped by their political parties
 - ii. hyper-partisanship exists as a result of a 'perpetual campaign' (to get reelected) which does not allow for cross-party consensus to pass good legislation
 - iii. there is a lack of governing when MPs are not taking the best action because they are conforming to party lines.
 - iv. question period is chaos and not effective
 - v. 'effectiveness' depends on the majority who control parliament and who benefits from what they do
 - vi. decorum has declined and parliament with it in the eyes of the voter
 - vii. a system of recall for MPs and Ministers is needed

3. Regarding measuring the health and indicators of democracy:
 - i. ensure continuation of constitutionally guaranteed individual freedoms
 - ii. give consideration to mandatory voting
 - iii. find ways to increase voter participation
 - iv. find ways to make parliament more closely resemble the demographics of the country
 - v. eliminate 'omnibus' bills
 - vi. laws should be passed by legislators not the courts
 - vii. the Senate needs to be elected or eliminated

4. Regarding what the relationship between an MP and his/her constituents should look like:
 - i. MPs should be able to respond to questions in a timely manner without resorting to form letters
 - ii. MPs need to bring forward the needs of their community
 - iii. improve two-way communication by including a designated MP office staff member for this role
 - iv. use of more town halls (at least 2 per year), workshops and sign-up for communications through email lists
 - v. higher visibility at community events
 - vi. access to MPs should be easy and multi-level

5. Regarding the strengths and weaknesses of First Past the Post:
 - a. Strengths:
 - i. Elections Canada provides faith the count will be accurate
 - ii. access to voting is provided for disabled, hospitalized etc
 - iii. MPs are accountable to a direct electorate
 - iv. good MPs are excellent advocates
 - v. rural regions enjoy a voice in Parliament not drowned out by urban concerns
 - vi. election campaigns are short
 - b. Weaknesses:
 - i. there is disproportionate representation in Parliament
 - ii. the current lack of enumeration
 - iii. the current system leads to strategic voting
 - iv. major media can exert significant control and manipulation
 - v. dishonesty is prevalent
 - vi. local MPs must have the ear of the 'power brokers' to be effective
 - vii. 'winner take all' without a majority of votes

6. Regarding alternative systems:
 - a. What have you heard?
 - i. Discussion focused around MMP, STV, ranked ballot. Some participants knew about New Zealand recently adopting PR and that there was better participation (voter turnout)
 - b. Likes about alternatives:
 - i. Both MMP and STV give closer representation in H of C and in regions
 - ii. In PR every vote counts
 - iii. A mix PR is a compromise that adds to a system people understand
 - iv. Ranked ballot is easy to understand
 - c. Concerns about alternatives:
 - i. they may not be perfect but are less 'imperfect' than the current system
 - ii. defining the 'uber' regions and ridings
 - iii. deciding how the 'top-up' MPs are chosen for the House of Commons. Close lists are not popular as MPs have no ties to constituents.
 - iv. campaign costs may be greater when regions are large

Thanks for the opportunity to present these views and suggestions to the committee and hope they are of value in determining how a new electoral system will benefit Canadians.