

**CAROLYNN COBURN**  
Haliburton ON

October 5, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform  
c/o House of Commons  
Ottawa ON

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am a Canadian citizen and President of a small not-for-profit, volunteer-run organization, Environment Haliburton!, that works to educate the public primarily in matters related to the environment. I refer to the organization below. However, the following comments are my own.

I did watch two of the sessions you held in Ottawa at the end of August when academics and political actors made presentations to the Committee. One suggestion that resonated with me was that if a referendum on changing the electoral system is seen to be advisable, it should be held after two election cycles in which a proportional representation system is used, so that the population has some experience with it. It appears that fear of an unknown has been partially responsible for rejection of proportional representation when it has been put to a referendum in other jurisdictions.

The other opinion that struck me as wise was in response to the question of electronic voting. The expert commented that we have a system that is accountable: scrutineers look directly at ballots and agree on what is on them; people trust the system; the current paper system works; we would risk losing the public's trust if we were to use an electronic system. There is no good reason to make that change.

Thirdly, the question of mandatory voting was discussed. I am opposed to this. I concur with the opinion expressed by one of the experts that mandatory voting would merely result in many people voting who have not informed themselves about issues. They might vote according to another person's recommendation, or randomly. It would be better to put effort into increasing voluntary engagement.

Environment Haliburton! held a meeting in September where we discussed the genesis of your Committee, the mandate, and, in particular, alternative voting systems. One of us prepared a power-point-presentation (PPP). Prior to the meeting, we realized that there were a lot of unfamiliar terms in the PPP which we wanted to abbreviate in the slides: FPTP, AV, STV, PR, List PR (closed or open), MMPR. Anticipating that the audience might find it a bit confusing, I set out make flip-chart sized posters defining each term, using sources from your website (Electoral Systems 101).

In short, I came to realize that it is a long conversation to explain the details of any one proportional representation system that attends to the values that you are mandated to consider. We had well-educated, politically-savvy citizens in attendance (we were about 30 people), and after the meeting, one of them commented that we should have another meeting just to understand how a MMPR system would work in practice. What would a ballot look like?

How big would the riding be? How would a directly-elected member be 'attached' to the riding to any greater degree than party-elected members?

I'm sure you are all thinking about these questions in much more detail, than I am. And I realize that my interest surpasses many of my fellow citizens. In light of that, I have come to the conclusion that it should not be up to the citizens to choose a particular electoral system.

At the most, if you were to pose a question to the population immediately, I suggest that it should be something like:

Which of the following electoral systems would you prefer?

*A system where one party can hold a majority of the seats in Parliament even though a minority of voters across the country voted for that party.*

OR

*A system where the number of seats in Parliament that a party holds corresponds to the number of votes cast across the country for that party.*

There may be better ways to pose the question, but I believe that you should not ask the population to vote for or against changing the system. You should only ask what kind of system the public wants. It would then be up to the politicians to choose the system that delivers what the public wants.

Of course, the majority of the current members of the House of Commons have indicated, by creating your Committee, that they believe the majority of Canadians favour the second system. That being the case, there does not appear to be a compelling case to go to the expense of asking the question at all. There is just the challenging work of identifying a proportional representation system that is the best one for Canada.

Finally, thank you for working hard to fulfil the mandate that Parliament gave you last June. It is so important. I trust you will suspend partisan considerations and use your best efforts to serve all Canadians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Carolyn Coburn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Carolynn Coburn