

TO: ERRE COMMITTEE

FROM: Sharon Howarth

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1. **MY COMMENTS ON PRINCIPLES GUIDING ERRE COMMITTEE**
 2. **OTHER VALUES ASSESSED -- Simplicity, Majority Gov't, Referendum**
 3. **CONCLUSION**
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1. **MY COMMENTS ON PRINCIPLES GUIDING ERRE COMMITTEE**

Principle 1: Effectiveness and legitimacy

An effective voting system is one where the seats in parliament are allocated in proportion to the votes a party or individual receives. An effective voting system equally measures and offers equality, fairness, effectiveness and voter choice. It should avoid the need to vote strategically, ie enable voters to vote freely for the candidates and parties of their choice, and make it easier for voters to hold representatives accountable.

Principle 2: Voter engagement

Once people experience a voting system which is more democratic and they see there is a much greater opportunity of their vote counting towards electing someone they support, they will start to re-engage in voting willingly.

Over the decades, people have become aware their vote goes nowhere, ie their vote rarely--if ever--has been counted to elect anyone they truly support and they have had to vote for someone they do not support to stop someone they support even less from becoming MP. This is strategic voting and means a lot of work and study with the end result of voting for someone you really don't want.

Principle 3: Accessibility and inclusiveness

A voting system, like FPTP demands considerable complexity. Strategic voter is what voters feel obliged to do and this takes a lot of work and is complex. People worldwide vote under PR systems and it is not difficult.

With inclusiveness, diversity is a source of strength. A PR system would make it easier to elect members that reflect Canada's diversity. It would also facilitate the election of popular independent candidates.

Principle 4: Integrity

Integrity is acknowledging that our present voting system, FPTP, is no longer the most democratic system in the world. Integrity is affirming that, under FPTP, seats in parliament are not allocated to political parties or individuals in accordance to the vote they received. Integrity is having the courage to recognize this and developing a made-in-Canada PR voting system

Principle 5: Local representation

Local representation is nice but NOT at the expense of having a person's vote have a significant effect in electing someone they truly support. Under FPTP there have been many candidates parachuted in to run as candidates. They are definitely not local. A PR voting system 'may' not support the ability to have a local representative but the voter will be able to access that representative and it does not mean they will not have the power in electing that representative next time around.

Even if the candidate is not local, as can happen with some PR voting systems, one would still be able to contact any of the MPs in one's riding—regardless of the size of the riding---and would still hold the power of voting them in or out, next election.

Having PR, and its multiple advantages, trumps the importance of having a local representative, having a 'so-called' simple system or ballot and having a majority if it does not come from the voters.

2. OTHER VALUES ASSESSED – Simplicity, Majority Gov't, Referendum

a) SIMPLE / SIMPLICITY (of system or ballot)

Anybody would choose 'simple'. Who would say they want a system, or anything in life for that matter, complicated. On the surface this looks like a valid question.

If simple ballot means having one column or two, surely this cannot be viewed as not simple. What is the purpose of such a question? Is it meant to support a FPTP ballot or that FPTP is slightly easier to count, but brings along 'unfairness' and not the best democratic results?

If simple means or results in:

- having to vote strategically
- my vote resulting in not counting to elect anyone that I support—which has been the high majority of the time

then I would not chose 'simple' or simplest.

If simple means only having to vote every 4 years, a majority will do that. So eventhough a majority is simplest, I would not support a majority if the majority a party receives is 'phony' and does honestly represent what the voters actually gave that party—let's say it was 40% of the vote--- then it is 60% of

the public that is being duped. What would result is that 60% of voters will be paying for a parliament that is passing laws that they do not agree with. The voting system may be simple or the simplest but it is of no value if it defeats what the majority of voters want and support.

The simplest of all is not having to vote at all and have a dictatorship. When he/she dies, a family member takes over. Very simple. Is this preferred? Absolutely NOT.

b) MAJORITY GOV'T

If a majority gov't is legitimately voted in by actual 'votes', it is legitimate. If producing a majority gov't means one that is phony and does not represent the vote, then this is blatantly unfair and undemocratic. This phony majority can mean that 60% and more of the voters will really not have representation and those that hold this phony majority will be able to pass laws for 4 years unobstructed. If this is what is meant by 'producing a majority gov't' then it is unfair and undemocratic. There are fairer voting systems.

c) REFERENDUM

A referendum is not needed as an 'Act of Parliament' is "legitimate". If one likes simple, an "Act of Parliament" is that.

There are tons of issues that the population have no interest in, it is not their main interest, or they don't understand the connection to their issue. There is no need to go to the population at large to get their approval. That is what Parliament is there to do and that is where a more democratic voting system---where seats in parliament will be allocated in proportion to the vote---will more fairly have Parliament run.

The Electoral Reform Committee structure reflects the Popular Vote, so this accurately reflects the voters' wishes and is 'legitimate'. The Committee has been listening to expert witnesses for months and are well qualified to make an informed decision based on what the majority of them say. Women and First Nations people were given the vote through an Act of Parliament. An 'Act of Parliament' is legitimate in this case.

I have Conservative values. The Conservative Party of today is not the Progressive Conservative Party I grew up with and it does not represent my most important values---democracy being at the top.

Having watched [ERRE on CPAC](#), with all the amazing expert witnesses that the Committee have listened to, time and time again, the Conservative representatives have steered their questions towards the need for a Referendum. I rarely heard any effort from them of hearing or learning more about the various voting systems. Their questions were single minded---need for a Referendum. They did not strike me as wanting to improve democracy or really being in support of voters.

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3. CONCLUSION

To the Liberals on this Committee, I implore you to maintain the same courage your leader and your party had when, prior to the last election, you vowed it would be the last election under FPTP and to take our voting system into the 21st century.

Many more voters---many in the younger demographics---voted for the first time because they believed in what the Liberal party was promising to do. It would disappoint or discourage by breaking a promise and choosing any other voting system other than a made-in-Canada form of Proportional Representation, which truly represents the voters' wishes.

If some of you do not support a made-in-Canada form of PR, the voters will be terribly disappointed and wonder why you made a promise and why you put everybody through this process and not able to come up with a voting system which represents voters, without the need of going back to the voters.

Liberal's want to be "fair". That is who you are. It is not being fair to forsake your majority position on this committee to satisfy and placate the minority---this would be a blow to democracy. Being fair is supporting the majority.

It is you members of the Liberal party on this Committee that have the power to do this. You want to be viewed as being "fair". Then embrace necessary change and be brave.

Sincerely,

Sharon Howarth.