



September 6, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform

Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

COPY

Attention: Chair, Scarpaleggia

Dear Chair & Committee Members:

I am a lawyer, former judge and proud Canadian. I have dedicated my life to rule of law, human rights and fostering democracy.

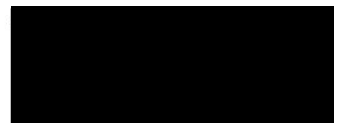
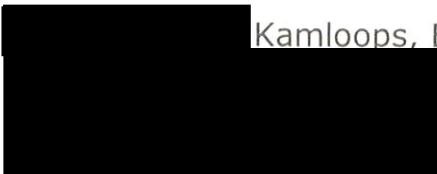
Canadian democracy is the product of generations of hard work and admired around the world. Throughout history, vital changes have necessary to grow and progress our democracy: the vote for women and excluded groups, election financing laws, independent election commission and riding boundaries redistribution, Repatriation and Charter of Rights & Freedoms. Improving our democracy is a work in progress, in constant need of refinement and renewal. We are now at an important crossroads and presented with a historical opportunity. Please do not squander it.

The first past the post voting system is broken and outdated. Canada is now behind most other leading democratic countries when it comes to having a modern and responsive voting system. Millions of Canadians are effectively shut out of parliamentary representation, they cast votes that do not contribute to electing an MP – in some ridings for decades. Voter turnout is trending generally towards decline. The current system engenders cynicism and alienation. This undermines our democracy and political participation.

The real question is: what is the best voting system for Canadians? Canadians should be able to expect that all Member of Parliament will approach this opportunity in good faith, placing democracy and a fair voting system ahead of partisan politics and party affiliation. It remains to be seen whether that will occur; history will judge the conduct and integrity of each MP accordingly.

More than a dozen bodies and commissions, including the Law Reform Commission of Canada, have studied the question: each has recommended some form of Proportional

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Representation. Their conclusions have common themes:

- Proportional Representation is fair, unlike, *FPTP*, which has a “winner take all” system. Proportional Representation makes every vote count, and eliminates strategic voting. It would eliminate false majorities and regional distortions. Quite frankly, the majority of Canadians tend to vote for parties other than the one that ultimately form government (often majority government with 100% power).
- Proportional Representation is diverse and inclusive. PR systems have shown improved representation from women and minorities. It enhances the participation and views of underrepresented persons and groups.
- Proportional Representation leads to more collaborative and consensus based governance and policy. It reduces the “winner take all” and adversarial nature of politics that many Canadians say undermines their confidence and repute of politicians and our political institutions.

Proportional Representation is vital to respecting the intentions of voters – fairer, more equal, more representative and engaging than *FPTP*. A core principle ought to be that if a party receives 25% of the vote, it should get 25% of the seats in parliament. PR would enhance the true intentions of voters and encourage parliament to serve the whole country by cooperation, compromise and consensus. The evidence is that PR systems have higher voter turnout. Every vote matters more.

PR systems are stable and accountable. Since 1945, Germany has had an election every 3.6 years, Italy 4.9 (yes, Italy!). Whereas, Canada has had an election every 3.2 years, since 1945. Most recently, from 2004-2011 parliamentarians and Canadians did not know if the government would fall on any given day. Some might contend, that precluded or delayed vital policies and legislation necessary for the good of the country.

That means some version of mixed-member (which seems more easily understood) or single transferable vote proportionality. I am confident that the Committee and parliament acting in good faith, in the common interest of enhancing our voting system and democracy, can work out the details of a PR system, with a made in Canada system or adaptations.

I wish to address the issue of a referendum. It is a bad idea. Referendums are almost invariably a lightning rod for a variety of dissatisfactions – too often, straying from and pandering to prejudice, ignorance and special interests. They are expensive, divisive and anathema to our system of representative government in a parliamentary system. Nor, is Electoral Reform a constitutional matter, it is a parliamentary matter – one for careful, informed, thoughtful, rational deliberation – not emotive, simplistic responses susceptible to manipulation by the wording of the question or well-resourced interests.

This is, indeed, a historic opportunity in building a more modern and responsive democracy to better serve the interests of all Canadians. Please act as genuine democrats committed to creating a legacy of an improved and reformed electoral system – above

party and political partisanship – one that you can proudly leave to all Canadians and succeeding generations. That system would be proportional representation.

All of which is submitted respectfully.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "B. William Sundhu". The signature is written in a cursive style.

B. William Sundhu,

Encls.

cc.

✓ Vice Chair, Scott Reid
Vice Chair, Nathan Cullen