

The Honourable Marie-Claude Bibeau
Member of Parliament for COMPTON–STANSTEAD

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS ON ELECTORAL REFORM
BY MARIE-CLAUDE BIBEAU, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

Constituency of Compton-Stanstead
Final Report

Date: Wednesday, August 3, 2016

Place: Bishop's University, 2600 College Street, Sherbrooke

Time: 9:30 am to 10:30 am

Highlights

- Improve the electoral system to ensure better representation of the interests of Canadians in the House of Commons, while maintaining the essential role of elected representatives in their respective constituencies;
- Reduce polarization in electoral debates by adopting new mechanisms;
- Introduce a voting system that will help to considerably increase the representation of women, Aboriginal people and immigrants among our elected representatives;
- Introduce electoral reform gradually so as not to play havoc with our democracy and the existing system, which has proven itself.

Background

On August 3, as part of the public consultations on democratic reform of the Government of Canada, more than 30 participants (see Appendix A) gathered at Bishop's University for public consultations. Representatives of private-sector firms, social enterprises, universities, non-profit organizations and other levels of government, as well as engaged citizens, had an opportunity to share their ideas relative to various issues associated with Canada's democratic institutions and make recommendations to provide direction for the government's work in preparing for democratic reform.

Although the participants could share their opinions on various voting systems, most of the discussions focused on the objectives of electoral reform. The participants gave special attention to the values that must serve as a guide in the reform of the electoral system so that it fosters greater participation by the people and better representation.

Each participant had three minutes to state his/her recommendations for electoral reform, and all those wishing to express their opinions were able to do so.

Summary of the discussions

The consultation framework facilitated exchanges of ideas on a wide variety of essential components for improving our electoral system over the long term. The participants' comments and the briefs they submitted are grouped into four key categories.

Restore the efficiency and legitimacy of the voting system

A majority of the participants at the consultations believed that it was important to improve or even change our voting system. They said that the main objective in making changes to the voting system should be to ensure better representation of the interests of the people in the House of Commons, while ensuring that the elected representatives continue to exercise an essential role in their respective constituencies over the long term. They talked about the introduction of a mixed voting system that combines majority and proportional concepts. However, there was no consensus regarding any system in particular.

At the same time, for the residents of our region, this reform must combat the emerging trend of strategic voting so as to ensure that voters vote for candidates who represent their interests. Some of them also highlighted the importance of promoting the work of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform and incorporating it into this reform project.

There was also a debate on the issue of a referendum to poll the people on the willingness to institute electoral reform. While some participants wanted to avoid a Canada-wide people's referendum on this sensitive issue, others believe that the issue is too important and that it is vital to give Canadians an opportunity to express themselves in a popular vote.

Promote higher voter participation

Most of the participants were concerned about the low voter turnout in the past elections. To combat this trend, some suggested making voting mandatory, as in Australia, and allowing electronic voting in order to significantly increase voter turnout. However, a

University of Sherbrooke professor cautioned participants on the issue of electronic voting by identifying some of the dangers of fraud related to electronic voting.

There was no doubt that the members of the public and the elected representatives consulted believed that communication is a key factor in implementing electoral reform. It was necessary to avoid making the process too complicated so as to ensure that the public understood all of the aspects of a new democratic structure. Making the process more burdensome could have the negative effect of discouraging voters from participating.

Preserving the integrity of the federal process

For a large part of the group of people consulted, it was necessary not only to preserve the integrity of the electoral process, but also to improve the existing structure in order to foster the people's optimum confidence in Canada's democratic system. Several elements were mentioned in order to achieve this objective, such as including the election of senators to allow voters to choose the representatives in the Upper Chamber and introducing a ranked-ballot system to reduce polarization in electoral debates.

In addition, the university professors in attendance pointed out the importance of introducing electoral reform gradually in order to avoid creating havoc for our democracy and the existing system that has already proven itself.

Preserving local representation and further empowering local representatives

Lastly, the primary role of candidates was mentioned several times. Many participants expressed their desire to be associated with a candidate rather than with a political party. Some said that in the current electoral system, the principle of Cabinet solidarity hindered their representatives from representing the interests of the people. According to the comments received, this principle encouraged voting for the party at the expense of the candidates during elections.

As solutions to expand the role of local representatives, a few participants said that the principle of Cabinet solidarity needed to be changed and that a more proportional system should be introduced.

APPENDIX A – PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONSULTATIONS

Surname	Given name	Organization	Title
Arango	Juan Ovidio	Citizen	Citizen
Barlow	Heather	Students' Representative Council, Bishop's University	Vice-President, Student Life
Beaubien	Francine	Citizen	Citizen
Boccanfuso	Dorothée	University of Sherbrooke	Assistant Dean, Management and Faculty Secretary, Full Professor, Faculty of Administration
Boisvert	Dominique	Citizen	Citizen
Bombardier	Jean-Luc	Les Fusiliers de Sherbrooke	Brigadier-General, Retired
Caron	Pacal	Canadian Armed Forces	Recruiting Sergeant
Carrière	Luc	Citizen	Citizen
Fonda	Nick	Citizen	Citizen
Gagnon	Morgan	Students' Representative Council, Bishop's University	Vice-President, Academic Affairs
Gauvin	Bernard	Ecotierra	Director of Marketing
Goodsell	Jessica	Students' Representative Council, Bishop's University	Director of Communications and Marketing
Goulet	Jean	Faculty of Science, University of Sherbrooke	Assistant Dean, Education
Keith	Heather	Citizen	Citizen
Jasmin	Pierre	Artistes pour la paix	Vice-President
Lauzon	Michel	Citizen	Citizen
Lavoie	Dominique	Students' Representative Council, Bishop's University	Director of Human Resources
Lefèvre	Christelle	Votre Croissance	Business Consultant
Lilford	Steve	Citizen	Citizen
Longchamps	Louis	Organisme de développement d'affaires	Executive Director

