BILL BLAIR

**TOWN HALL REPORT
ON ELECTORAL REFORM
PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

BILL BLAIR

**RAPPORT SUR LES CONSULTATIONS
PUBLIQUES SUR LA RÉFORME
ÉLECTORALE**

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CONSULTATION(S)			
Date(s) of the Meeting(s)	**Time and Length (start time and end time)**	**Location of Consultation**	**Total Number of People in Attendance (you may indicate the number of volunteers and employees who assisted with the meeting)**
1.September 8, 2016	6:30pm to 8:00pm	Warden Hilltop Community Centre 25 Mendelssohn St, Toronto, ON M1L 0G6	60

Form: □ **Use of the Library of Parliament's visual presentation**
        □ **Presentation from the MP's office**
        □ **Open microphone**
        □ **Question and answer session**
        □ Guest speaker
        □ Other (please specify):

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)			
Voting systems: Yes	Replacement of the current voting system: Yes	Voter turnout: Yes	Accessibility and inclusiveness: Yes
Mandatory voting: Yes	Online voting: Yes	Local representation: Yes	Other (please specify and describe below): Referendum and Term Limits

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated? (suggested limit: 500 words)

Participants felt that key benefits of the current system were that it is simple to understand, results in more stable governance, and allows for accountability.

With regards to what more stable governance meant, participants explained that it meant more majority governments that could serve their full term. This is in contrast to minority governments which would result in more frequent elections, which supporters of the current system feared would occur under a new electoral system.

In terms of accountability, participants explained that in a minority government situation, the party with the most seats may need to form a coalition with one other party or more to form government. This would open the window for the parties in the coalition to break election promises, and place the blame on their coalition partners by explaining that they had to concede certain election

promises as part of their coalition agreement.

When discussing flaws of the current system, participants suggested that the current system encouraged strategic voting, where supporters of a smaller party that is polling third or fourth in pre-election polling felt the need to vote for one of the larger parties in order to stop their least preferred party. Further, participants noted the fact that most majority governments do not in actuality receive over fifty percent of the popular vote and therefore do not represent the majority of Canadians. Participants also linked the current system to low voter turnouts and many suggested that a new system could result in a greater turnout on election day.

Proponents of the current system felt that their votes were fairly translated. This stemmed mainly due to the simplicity of the system, whereby one votes for the candidate that they prefer the most and the candidate with the most votes wins the election. This group felt that a new system would result in more ambiguity on how the winner would be determined. On the other hand, opponents of the current system felt that the current system did not fairly translate their vote due to the issues described above such as strategic voting, and the reality that majority governments rarely win more than fifty percent of the popular vote.

Which alternatives to the current system were discussed? Did participants identify specific features that are important to them in an electoral system (for example local representation, proportionality, simplicity, legitimacy etc.)? (suggested limit: 500 words)

In addition to the current First Past The Post system, the following systems were presented by the MP and discussed: Alternative Vote, List Proportional Representation, Single Transferrable Vote, and Mixed Member Proportional. However, of these alternatives, the ones most commonly brought up by participants were First Past The Post, Proportional Representation and Alternative Voting.

In our discussion, participants expressed a wide range of features that were of importance to them. However, no single feature stood out as being more important than the others. Some key aspects discussed were the ability to hold their representative accountable, the legitimacy of the term "majority government" where one party did not receive the support of 50% of the electorate, potential term limits, and ways to increase voter turnout so that the government reflects the wishes of a greater percentage of the eligible voters.

Did participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation? (suggested limit: 500 words)

Participants at our townhall expressed some disappointment at the fact that a large number of eligible voters choose to not cast their ballot. In general, participants felt that this was mainly due to a conception that a single vote does not make a difference. Some also raised a possibility that young voters felt disconnected from the democratic system, as it is requires a person to go out and vote in person. This is in contrast to using digital, online, and mobile technology to complete daily tasks such as banking, which is what many young Canadians are used to.

In terms of ways to encourage participation, many felt that other voting mechanisms such as introducing online voting or mandatory voting should be considered.

Did participants feel that it should it be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

There were some participants at our consultation in favour of the idea of mandatory voting, citing examples of increased turnout in countries like Australia. A few participants even suggested introducing a small fine for not voting in a mandatory voting system.
On the contrary, a large number of participants also felt that the right to not cast a ballot is an individual's choice and that there should be no penalty for failing to cast a ballot. This group felt that individuals should not be required to vote unless they have made an educated decision on whom they would like to cast their ballot for. These participants feared an undesirable outcome at the polls due to what they perceived as uneducated voters.

Did participants discuss online voting? Did they express a desire to maintain current voting practices? (i.e. presenting themselves at a polling station, vote secrecy etc.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

A very large number of participants expressed that they would support the introduction of online voting. All participants who spoke agreed that it would lead to a high voter turnout, but many expressed concerns that it could pose a security risk in terms of voter fraud and vote manipulation. However, others contended that if online banking could be done in a secure manner, a secure approach to online voting could also be developed. A few individuals raised concerns about issues such as server shutdowns and not being able to ensure that every citizen has internet access on voting day as impediments to online voting. Lastly, all participants who spoke agreed the current system of voting in person at a polling station should still be an available option, even if online voting were to be introduced.

Were any other major topics raised by the participants? (i.e. referendum, women/minority representation, accessibility, voter turnout etc.) (suggested limit: 500 words)

Two topics that were raised by participants included the possibility of a referendum on electoral reform and the idea of term limits.

Those in favour of a referendum suggested that legislation that changes the way in which the public exercises their right to vote was far too important to be left in the hands of representatives, and should rather be decided directly by the electorate. However, those opposed to the referendum suggested that the incumbent Government has a mandate to change the electoral system, as electoral reform is something that the current Prime Minister had pledged to the Canadian public during the previous election campaign. Other opponents of a referendum feared that a referendum would stand in the way of change as voter apathy amongst those in favour of reform would skew the vote in favour of those strongly opposed to electoral reform. A poll by a show of hands suggested about 40% of the participants were in favour of a referendum, while another 40% opposed the idea of a referendum. 20% did not vote.

The idea of term limits was one that was floated by one participant. A few others agreed, but the topic did not generate much discussion. Proponents felt that a Member of Parliament should be limited to 2 or 3 terms in office.

SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS (suggested limit: 1000 words)

The residents in Scarborough Southwest who attended our electoral reform public consultation saw the townhall as a constructive way for their voices to be heard in this conversation. Their comments indicated that there is a desire to discuss the different electoral methods and also a desire to discuss ways in which the voter turnout can be increased. Below is a summary of comments that constituents in Scarborough Southwest put forward at this consultation.

There were a number of participants who felt that a referendum is required to bring about a change to our method of voting, while an equal number believed that no referendum is required. However, it must be noted that a large number of participants were undecided on whether they believe that a referendum is needed.

In terms of discussing the different voting methods, the two methods that participants seemed to compare and contract the most were proportional representation and the current first past the post system. There was also discussion surrounding the Alternative Voting method, but participants appeared to be less familiar with this method, compared to the other two. Many constituents contacted my office subsequent to attending the townhall to gain more information on the different voting methods, suggesting that more could be done to inform Canadians on the voting methods that they are less familiar with. Common themes that were noted while discussing the different voting methods were the need to ensure that the method chosen is simple and easily understandable, and allows for stable and accountable governance.

There was a great deal of discussion around ideas to increase voter turnout, and the vast majority of participants agreed that more needs to be done to address this issue. Many participants supported the idea of mandatory voting, citing its success in other countries. However, others felt that it may not be wise to force individuals to vote. Other methods to increase voter turnout, such as online voting gained near unanimous support amongst participants, guaranteed that it could be provided in a secure manner and that access to voting could be guaranteed to all citizens.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)	Date: October 12, 2016
MP's signature:	Bill Blair, M.P. Scarborough Southwest