Submission to the Special Committee on Electoral Reform

30 September 2016

Mark Gerretsen, M.P.

Kingston and the Islands

Town Hall on Electoral Reform

Date: September 15 2016
Location: Memorial Hall, located within Kingston City Hall
Hosted by: Mark Gerretsen, MP for Kingston and the Islands

Moderator: Professor Jonathan Rose

Note taker: Steven Patterson

Other notes: approximately 90 people attended the meeting. Participants were seated in groups of 6-10 people throughout 12 tables in Memorial Hall. The moderator, Professor Jonathan Rose, stood at the front of the room and guided the discussion with an accompanying PowerPoint presentation. The note taker, Steven Patterson, was also at the front of the room and his notes were projected onto a screen and visible to the audience. Please note that every effort was made to ensure that these notes accurately reflect the participant's statements.

INTRODUCTION – MARK GERRETSEN AND DR. JONATHAN ROSE

<u>Mark Gerretsen</u>

- MP Gerretsen discussed the history and importance of reforming the current electoral system.

- He explained that the government has committed to making 2015 the last election conducted under first-past-the-post.

- He introduced the moderator for tonight's town hall, Professor Jonathan Rose.

- He noted that Dr. Rose has been a Professor of Political Studies at Queen's University for over 20 years and that his research interests include political communication, and political advertising, as well as the practice of deliberative democracy- which makes him uniquely suited for this type of event

- MP Gerretsen highlighted Dr. Rose's expertise on the subject of electoral reform, including his tenure as the academic director of

the Ontario Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform in 2007, and that he appeared as witness to the special parliamentary committee on electoral reform.

Professor Jonathan Rose

- Goes over town hall agenda which was as follows:

  - *Background: Why we're here…*
  - Objectives
  - Principles' Based Discussion
  - Dialogue Agreements
  - Roundtable Discussion (3 x 20 mins)
  - Summary and Closing Remarks

- Suggests 'Google Canada democracy' to access the online consultation.
- Said that there are three topics the committee will study: **Electoral system**, online voting, mandatory voting
- Focus of this meeting is electoral system
- Professor Rose introduced the concept of a principles-based discussion: ideas or structures that underlie the electoral system. That the committee, citizen assemblies, and experts have identified.
- This is the opportunity for citizens (you) to have input.
- Reminds audience to keep dialogue agreements in mind.

QUESTION 1: WHY DO YOU VOTE?

- Professor Rose instructed the audience to discuss this question for approximately 15 minutes with their group.

- He asked that they designate one spokesperson who will report back to the room with a summary of the group's discussion. He specifically asks that each group try to determine the top 3 reasons why you choose to vote.

The following is a summary of the reasons given by the representative for each table:

Table 1   1. Have voice heard   2. Sharpen focus on issues and engage in process/community   3. Civic duty and responsibility of citizenship
Table 2   1. Voices heard through outcome   2. My responsibility   3. Values represented through outcome
Table 3   1. Responsibility to elect representatives who reflect our values   2. Best mechanism to get things done peacefully   3. Hold elected representatives accountable and legitimacy
Table 4   1. Matter of principle for party or person   2. Strategic to keep certain person / party out   3. Formal opportunity to engage in democratic process
Table 5   1. Vote for a person or party that best reflects their values   2. Duty to vote   3. People feel that it's a privilege to have a say in who's governing them
Table 6   1. Values and beliefs to be heard   2. Responsibility to do so. If you're a Canadian it's your right and responsibility.   3. We live in a democracy, not a dictatorship   4. Lots to learn looking at other countries   5. Support party
Table 7

1. Optimism that vote will bring about positive change 2. Duty to vote – gives right to criticize 3. Makes us mindful of government action
Table 8 1. Influence policy and have voice heard 2. Identify with and communicate in concert with our communities 3. Civic duty and privilege
Table 9 1. Ideals and ideology 2. Preventing something from happening aka fear 3. Finding best person/candidate for the job
Table 10 1. Long term strategic candidates 2. Democratic opportunity to voice concern 3. Responsibility of citizenship and access parliament
Table 11 1. Participate in democratic privileges and rights 2. Offset corporate power 3. Show support for certain policies
Table 12 1. Civic privilege 2. Make society a better place. 3. Support person or candidate

After each group reported back, Professor Rose asked if there were any other thoughts on this question, or reaction to what has been said. The following is a summary of audience member's contributions:

- Being mindful of political issues.

- Important to be aware of issues and knowledgeable to avoid being led along.

- Voting out of fear, came up 4 times. This is sad, and shouldn't be part of any voting system. Should vote for things we want, not against them or strategically.

- For so many, the reasons why they vote are not in line with result.

- Problem with electoral turnout. A lot of the great reasons to vote. If they become disillusioned, they won't vote.

- Reasons have to do with 'wants' not 'should' e.g. want people who share values etc.

- Is voting a right, duty, or responsibility? Or all 3?

- So influenced by US presidential system. Their system elects one person. In Canada, we elect a local representative. Contradiction.

- Sometimes you can like candidate, but not party. Eg. C-246 related to animal rights

- Difference between local representative and governments position (e.g. C-246).

- Similar responses: want voices to be heard, have influence.

- People in room are civically engaged, but for those who have not voted (35-40%), does that make them any less Canadian?

- Is it a right or responsibility? In some countries, people voted but it didn't lead to good outcome.

- If you vote, do you count? This came up in issue of students being counted in municipal elections.

- Our society is responsible for all citizens.

- Why do we have to be colored red, blue or green, or orange? This is troubling.

- People have thoughts and ideas, why do we have to be divided into parties.

- We should vote on issues, not parties.

<u>Professor Rose</u>

- Political parties are a shorthand way to understand issues. Average person is too busy to have an understanding of every issue. All democracies have political parties.

- Government is reviewing electoral system, not individual votes.

- Government is asking if rules that translate votes to aggregate are sufficient.

QUESTION 2: WHICH 3 PRINCIPLES DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO AN ELECTORAL SYSTEM?

- Professor Rose introduced the second question. This question tasked each group to identify the three principles that they felt were most important to an electoral system.

- The PowerPoint presentation included a table which listed 13 different principles. These included the 5 principles identified by the committee, and 8 principles that had been used by other provincial citizen assemblies.

- Professor Rose went over each principle, and explained what they can mean in the context of an electoral system.

- Groups were asked select their top 3 from this list, or to create their own. Each table was given a yellow cue card to write down their top 3 choices.

The following was the table shown to participants:

Principles Behind an Electoral System	
Effectiveness & Legitimacy	Fairness of Representation
Engagement	Voter Choice
Accessibility and Inclusiveness	Effective Parties
Integrity	Stable & Effective Government
Local Representation	Effective parliament
Simplicity and practicality	Stronger Voter Participation
Accountability	*Your ideas?*

Before beginning roundtable discussion on this question, several participants made the following points:

- People need education about models, and this discussion is very focused on philosophy and is more similar to a university lecture.

- Government is committed to changing electoral system. People need education on different models.

Professor Rose

- Principles-based discussion is analogous to buying a car, first you decide what you're looking for (e.g. price), and then you search for a car that meets what you're looking for.

MP Gerretsen

- Reiterated that it's important to focus on values

- He noted that not everyone has a great understanding of the different systems, so it's important to begin by discussing values.

One participant contributed the following before tables began discussion on Question 2:

- What about the legitimacy of what we decide? Feels there should be a referendum.

QUESTION 2: PART 2

After approximately 20 minutes of discussion, Mark Gerretsen, Professor Rose and other staff from MP Gerretsen's office collected the cards which tables used to identify their top principles. These data were entered into the table shown below. Once this was complete, the table was projected onto the screen and was visible to the participants. Professors Rose quickly summarized the results, and then asked the audience to provide their feedback. When this feedback related to a specific principle, it was recorded in column 3. When this feedback was more general, it was recorded below.

Level of Support for Various Principles of Electoral Reform

Principle	Support	Notes
Fairness of Representation	*********** (12)	- Not surprised. Unease about fairness of first-past-the-post (FPTP). Awkward political promise.
Accountability	******** (8)	
Local Representation	****** (6)	
Accessibility and Inclusiveness	***** (5)	
Integrity	****(4)	
Effectiveness & Legitimacy	*** (3)	
Stable & Effective Government	** (2)	
Engagement	* (1)	- This is consequence of good electoral system, it's not a goal, it's a given.

		-Surprised did not receive more support. Voting age is something to consider. Had success in Scottish referendum. If we have first-past-the-post, we have to ensure engaged electorate, more discussion.
Voter Choice	* (1)	
Added by participants: Transparency	* (1)	
Added by participants: A system where every vote and every idea counts	* (1)	- Related to consensus idea. - This principle is not captured. Essential to changing our functioning. - Alternatives, not absolutes. Every vote counts.
Added by participants: Consensus Building	*(1)	- Discuss issues to find solution, not just take a side.
Simplicity and Practicality	0	
Effective Parties	0	
Effective Parliament	0	
Stronger Voter Participation	0	

Note: Column two indicates the frequency of support for that principle. Each star represents one selection (i.e. the table included this principle on their index card).

OTHER COMMENTARY IN RESPONSE TO THE RESULTS AND GENERAL REFLECTION ON THE EVENT:

- Some principles would follow from others. Up to interpretation.
- Top 3 principles look like Mixed Member Plurality.
- Problem with whipped votes in Parliament. Concerned that votes are party driven, disconnect between local views and Members of Parliament's (MPs).
- Referenced MP Michael Chong reforms
- Important for local MP to represent 'us'. MPs should have an equal vote. The Prime Minister should not be too powerful.

- Feels most people have strong views about Proportional Representation. Understood that previous government committed to end 'winner take all' elections.
- Feels ranked ballot could make democracy worse
- Not just list of platitudes, should have a discussion about mechanism for future elections. It may follow from principles, but I think it should be open to discuss mechanisms and bring forward recommendations.
- Likes first-past-the-post. It works. People who voted for government are satisfied, people who voted for MPs are satisfied. System we know and are familiar with.
- Political professionals will think of different methods to game the system.
- Shared value, should we entrust that government to push this as replacement? Referendum?
- Surprised of process. Happy we are going to make our own model, not attached to other countries.
- Promise of electoral reform, doesn't mean looking for a brand new system. The Prime Minister promised reform. If that means first-past-the-post can be amended, that's a possibility. Appreciates the process and forced to think of the opposite side.
- Afraid that new MPs are going to find it difficult to change system, because they were elected by it.
- Idea of majority governments is the 'pinnacle of success'.. going to be tough to move away from this.
- Referendum: how to successfully reform elections? Look to New Zealand. They had same system, before they had referendum they first gave the new system a chance. No spending limits on referendum.
- Referendum would be betrayal of election promise. We were promised that this would be the last first-past-the-post election. The reason provincial referendum lost was the awkward proposal, that was more confusing than not. Looking forward to true representation.
- Choice: my understanding: in the last election platform we were told goodbye first-past-the-post, and that choice would be and/or.

- Ranked ballot and/or proportional representation. Hopes this choice is still being offered.
- Ranked ballot= another winner take all system.
- We can have ranked ballot AND proportional system. Cake and eat it too.
- New Zealand. Has experience voting in Norway. Urge committee to examine voting systems in other democracies to see their successes and difficulties. We should see how they work.
- Timeline: unsettled by the artificial timeline. Is there a way to give this more time? Should not force this artificially.
- Referendums: had 3 in Canada: prohibition, conscription, constitutional matters. Can only have referendums on constitutional issues… we can't have referendums.

Professor Rose

- Importance of real world examples.
- Nervous to talk about systems.
- Consider Proportional Representation system in Turkey that does not count Kurds. Is that what we want?
- Could a Proportional Representation system devalue francophone vote?
- Single transferable vote system in Ireland. Is that what we want?
- How these systems work is incredibly varied throughout the world.
- Samara website – guide of different electoral systems.
- Provide government with evidence-based advice. Hopes that government takes opinions from Canadians seriously.

Professor Rose thanked everyone for attending, thus concluding the town hall. Participants were offered feedback sheets to fill out as they left. These data are compiled below.

Electoral Reform Feedback Forms

Summary of Data Collected

Number of forms collected: 12

In-person at the event: 9

Mailed, emailed or dropped off form: 3

Age distribution: **under 18:** 0   **18-35:** 3   **36-50:** 0   **51-65:** 2   **Over 65:** 6   **Unidentified:** 1

Gender distribution: **Female:** 6   **Male:** 5   **Unidentified:** 1

PARTICIPANTS FEEDBACK TO 3 QUALITATIVE QUESTIONS
Question 1: What did you like about the town hall?
Opportunity to speak with others. Importance of real-world examples. Being thoughtful about principles desired.
Too much on self-evident platitudes: (fairness, integrity), not systems.
Great attendance, well organized and moderated(?)
Wide ranging discussion
I liked the open concept of the town hall allowing everyone to participate.
Its organization.
Little.
Made one think more seriously on this important topical(?) issue.
By having a town hall, it raised public awareness around this most important topic. It required everyone involved (members of the public who attended/organizers/our MP, Mark Gerretsen, and Professor Jonathan Rose) to focus on different aspects of issues pertaining to electoral reform, and to open their minds to other peoples' points of view. Everyone had opportunities to discuss the issues (that were introduced by Professor Rose) within a small group, and in some cases, people were able to share their ideas with the larger group. Professor Rose called this 'a participatory event'. Having participants' feedback immediately displayed on the screen was an effective way to hold the crowd's attention (for at least awhile) and to organize the conversation.
That it happened
Attendance of so many like-minded concerned citizens. The chance to speak.
Question 2: What could we improve on?
More informative about options as well as process of selection.
Audio system
Maybe a place where the acoustics are better?
More direct discussion of policy choices.

More discussion on Electoral Reform.
Audio system very poor.
I think there should be some identification(?) of the problem with first-past-the-post electoral system after all the –
Because organizers were reluctant to introduce in-depth conversations about specific voting systems (thereby getting 'into the weeds'), a decision was made to instead discuss general questions/considerations pertaining to voting systems, such as: *why do we vote? / prioritize values of importance that need to be reflected in a chosen voting system.* While it's important citizens understand how values of importance need to be reflected in a chosen voting system, it's also important that citizens discuss - if not particular voting systems - at least the 2 main **families** of voting systems, and the general characteristics of each. This isn't difficult. Many have already taken the time to learn about, not only families of voting systems, but particular voting systems within each family. Others are well-aware of (at the very least) the difference between winner-take-all systems of voting and systems that belong to the Proportional Representation family. It's important that the government, and those representing the government at a town hall, recognize the fact that much of the population has a good, basic understanding of the differences between families of voting systems. People should have an opportunity to explain why they believe, for instance, that PR is needed for Canada. So, rather than spending almost the entire 2 hours on ranking values of importance, etc., it would have been better to move on to the next step in the process. This was to have been a consultative process. People were frustrated that they couldn't communicate their points of view on critical issues. It could have been done with civility. Rules of engagement could have been put in place to ensure fairness and a good code of conduct. Discussing *how* principles/values relate to a family of electoral systems is key. The process followed during a town hall needs to be different from the process followed during a citizens' assembly. In the case of the former, it's more of a consultative process rather than an educational process. A citizens' assembly takes place over many months, which means there's a strong educational component as well. Important consultations were missing from the town hall. We need to confront the key issues, controversial though they may be - once again, in a respectful way of course. Towards the end of the meeting, there was an attempt on the part of some to make their voices heard regarding critical aspects of voting reform - such as government promises, the need to connect values with particular types of systems, and referenda. At the beginning of the town hall, we appreciated Mr. Gerretsen's review of the process that has been put in place. It would have been helpful also to remind people of the government's promises during the election campaign. (These promises are the starting point for the entire process.): - to make every vote count
- to adopt a voting system for Canada after considering "... preferential ballots and/or a voting system based on Proportional Representation" We also appreciated hearing Professor Rose's message regarding types of engagement that are required. Professor Rose led the discussion with skill, and by contributing important relevant information.
A suggestion:
Following a half-hour discussion around important values that need to be reflected in a voting system, there could have been 2 speakers, each speaking (and/or making power point presentations) for about 15 minutes:

1. Alternative Vote (preferential ballots in a single-member riding) 2. Proportional Representation A discussion could have followed these 2 speeches.
There needed to be a facilitator at each tabled – we had several people at our table that were unwilling and unable to work at consensus building which was frustrating + some of us did not have our views expressed. There are better ways to get consensus and strategies that could have brought the whole group together. ICA offers training – I would have used something called the Facilitation Method (ICA is Intercultural Affairs). People were expecting to debate the various methods of electoral reform – there should have been more information about the goals of the town hall.
It was frustrating to be limited to general principles. Our table 2 all wanted a chance to vote on actual mechanisms – proportional representation.

Question 3: What are you taking away from today's town hall? Do you have any other feedback to include in our notes?

What was the point of coming here? No clear purpose. I don't feel more informed or more comfortable with this process.
I hope other town halls are more effective.
My group focused on the "consultatory(?)" nature of a government, where parties collaborate. This could be one of the important outcomes of a proportional system.
Seems to be stronger support for PR.
Will changing the electoral system be enough when so much power resides in the unelected PMO and Ministerial Responsibility is no more. How does the electoral system empower the PMO – what has to change to restore power to Parliament?
It seems Canada would need a system based on representation and local representation. And Please, <u>NO</u> REFERENDUM!!!
No referendum.
Fair representation is the key. Other values and principles can be dealt with with the detailed rules and regulations.
Pleased that the government has an online survey to enable Canadians to share their viewpoints. Also pleased that the ERRE has listened to the testimony of many well-informed witnesses. There are opportunities for citizens to provide feedback to the ERRE. Despite this, there remains a lack of transparency. There is a reluctance to address the issues outlined above. In the next few days, my husband and I will be sending a letter to Mr. Trudeau, which we will share with Mr. Gerretsen, Professor Rose, and many others.
I support proportional representation – negotiation, consensus-building + compromise are the the Canadian way- we would have a stronger government that would have to reflect the will of the people – the Scandinavian system is an example.
The process is out my hands – I will have no say in what is decided. My fear is that the committee will choose the most expedient option – ranked ballots – which is no better than FPTP.