

**LARRY MILLER, MP
BRUCE-GREY-OWEN SOUND**

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



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

**LARRY MILLER, MP
BRUCE-GREY-OWEN SOUND**

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

OVERVIEW

This document has been prepared by the Office of Larry Miller, Member of Parliament for Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, for the House of Commons Special Committee on Electoral Reform in response to the invitation from the Chair on Friday, July 8th, 2016.

This report outlines the response received by Mr. Miller's office during a telephone town hall meeting that he hosted specifically on the topic of electoral reform. The report outlines what constituents told Mr. Miller during the tele-forum as well as a summary of the written submissions that were sent to the Office of Larry Miller following the tele-forum.

Furthermore, a riding wide-mailing was sent from Mr. Miller's office which included a questionnaire on electoral reform. The results of this questionnaire will also be reflected in this report.

CONSULTATION

Date of the Meeting	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)
Tuesday, September 27 th , 2016	60 minutes 7:00p.m. – 8:00p.m.	Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound (An outbound call was sent to all residents of the riding. Residents also had the option to call in)	A total of 5,526 individual households participated in the call over the hour. Peak attendance during the call was 721.

***NOTE:** During the tele-forum, there were individuals that had wanted to participate on the live

call but did not have an opportunity to do so due to a heavy volume of callers. These individuals, and others, were encouraged to submit their comments in writing to Mr. Miller’s office. The comments, concerns, and opinions expressed in these written submissions will be included in this report.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary – Y = YES, N = NO)			
Voting systems: Y	Replacement of the current voting system: Y	Voter turnout: Y	Accessibility and inclusiveness: Y
Mandatory voting: Y	Online voting: Y	Local representation: Y	Other (please specify and describe below) : Y

Other subjects discussed included:

- The need for a national referendum to change the voting system
- Education surrounding alternative voting systems/Lack of information and clarity
- Effectiveness of the current electoral system
- Ensuring that every vote counts
- NOT increasing the number of Members of Parliament

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
<p>What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated?</p> <p>Participants in the tele-forum stated that they were generally satisfied with the way that the current system for electing Members of Parliament works. Participants noted that the current system ensures that MPs are accountable to their constituents and are directly elected by constituents to serve the riding.</p> <p>Several participants noted that a change to proportional representation system could result in a lack of representativeness and sense of local responsibility to the constituents. This was also reflected in several written submissions to Mr. Miller’s office.</p> <p>There were some constituents that expressed that they do not feel satisfied with the current electoral system. Most note that they would prefer a Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP) electoral system.</p>

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.)?

Alternatives to the current voting system were discussed during the tele-forum as well as in the written submissions that were received. The majority of respondents felt that alternative systems to the current system were far too complex and they did not fully understand how they work. They stated that they enjoyed the simplicity of marking an 'X' beside their preferred candidate. Several constituents noted that they would be concerned that rural Canada would be under-represented under a proportional system as a large concentration of votes would come from urban areas.

Furthermore, some constituents noted that they worried that some systems of ranked balloting would force them to vote for candidates that they did not want to vote for (i.e. they only have one preferred candidate so they do not want to be forced to pick a second preference).

During the tele-forum, the following poll question was asked of the participants:

“The range of possible changes to the electoral system is wide-sweeping with many complex systems as alternatives. Do you feel that you have been properly educated about alternative voting systems?”

The results of the poll question were as follows:

Yes – 9%
No – 81%
Unsure – 11%

Therefore, it is clear that respondents do not feel that they fully understand how several of the alternative systems would work.

Some support for alternative voting systems was expressed in some of the written submissions following the tele-forum. Most notably was support for a system of Mixed-Member Proportional representation. These constituents stated that a form of Mixed-Member Proportional representation would balance regional representation with national representation.

Did participants discuss why they feel many Canadians choose not to engage in the democratic process? Did they suggest ways to encourage participation?

This was not a topic that was discussed extensively during the tele-forum or in the written submissions. Many constituents did express that they were unsure of why the process of electoral reform was taking place as they were satisfied with the current system. They also felt that the simplicity of the current system actually encourages voters to participate. Other more complex systems could actually have a negative effect on voter turnout by intimidating some Canadians due to their complexity.

The following poll question was asked during the tele-forum:

“The Government has stated that it will thoroughly engage all Canadians in consultations on electoral reform. Do you feel that you have been properly consulted on this topic?”

The results of this poll question are as follows:

Yes - 12%

No - 63%

Unsure – 24%

Only 12% of respondents felt that they had been thoroughly engaged in the electoral reform process. Therefore, the Government must engage further with Canadians during this process before moving forward with ANY proposed reform.

The topic of voter turnout was the subject of an extremely limited number of submissions to Mr. Miller’s office. One submission suggested that a decline in voter turnout was the result of the current electoral system. Although, given that voter turnout increased during the last election it would appear there is not a direct correlation.

Did participants feel that it should be mandatory to cast a ballot? (Can include spoiling a ballot.)

The topic of mandatory voting was not a focal point of the tele-forum but was referenced several times and was the subject of some written submissions. One written submission stated that mandatory voting has been used successfully in Australia for a number of years. However, this was the only individual who felt that mandatory voting should be implemented.

Most of those who discussed mandatory voting stated that they would not be in favour of implementing such a system in Canada.

One of the most compelling questions on this topic came from a caller in the tele-forum who asked about the implications of mandatory voting for those who are not mentally capable of casting a ballot (ex. Those who are mentally challenged or those who have debilitating diseases such as Alzheimer’s Disease). Would there be an exception made for these individuals? Or, would they face a penalty for not being able to cast a ballot? It is certainly something that the committee should consider when/if it discusses the implementation of a system of mandatory voting in Canada.

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.)

Online voting was referenced in both the tele-forum and the written submissions. There was mixed reaction to online voting but overall constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound seem to be skeptical that it could be implemented in a way that ensures that there would be no tampering with the

results.

A caller on the tele-forum asked about the type of software that would be used and how Elections Canada would be able to ensure that the person who is actually casting the ballot online is who they say they are. He had a number of fears about voter fraud and stolen identity.

One written submission stated that they would be in favour of implementing online voting as it would encourage more young Canadians to vote and engage in the democratic process in Canada.

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

There were two other major topics that were raised during the tele-forum that will be outlined here:

Need for a National Referendum:

An overwhelming majority of participants on the tele-forum and those who submitted written submissions stated that there is absolutely a necessity for the Government to hold a national referendum on electoral reform before implementing any changes and that keeping the current electoral system must be an option on the ballot.

During the tele-forum, the following poll question was asked:

“Should changes to the electoral system be subject to a vote in a national referendum?”

The results were as follows:

Yes - 72%
No - 15%
Unsure – 13%

Therefore, most participants agree that a national referendum should be held before the Government moves forward with any changes to the electoral system. This was also made abundantly clear over the course of the tele-forum as well as in the written submissions.

Furthermore, the questionnaire that was included in the riding-wide mailing from Mr. Miller’s office asked constituents explicitly about the need for a national referendum before changes to the electoral system are made. The question asked:

“Do you agree that there should be a national referendum on electoral reform?”

The results were as follows:

Yes - 82%
No - 9%

Unsure - 9%

Therefore, constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound have made it very clear that they expect the Government to hold a national referendum before any changes to the electoral system are made.

Do NOT Increase the Number of MPs:

One of the most common opinions expressed by constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound was that they emphatically did not want the number of Members of Parliament to increase under the current or any new proposed system.

Several callers throughout the evening stated that they would worry about implementing any new system that increased the number of MPs from the current 338. Constituents expressed their concerns about the cost of adding new seats and paying the salaries of additional MPs. This sentiment was expressed by those who wanted to keep the current electoral system as well those who would like to see it change. After outlining his support for a proportional electoral system one constituent in a written submission stated: “There is no need to increase the number of MPs under any system and [this] could therefore keep the size and cost of Government under better control”.

This was one of the most common opinions that were expressed throughout the consultation.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Overall, the key findings of the consultation process with constituents in the riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound were:

- There **MUST** be a national referendum before the Government moves forward with any changes to the electoral system in Canada;
- More public education is needed to inform constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound and all Canadians about different electoral systems;
- There are some in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound that would like to see the electoral system reformed to better reflect the views of all voters;
- Reforms to the electoral system must ensure that MPs are accountable to their constituencies and that the breakdown of electoral districts does not disadvantage rural Canadians;
- The electoral reform process should not increase the number of MPs that are elected to the House of Commons;

- The Government needs to consult more broadly with Canadians on the electoral reform process as many feel that they have not been properly consulted at this point;
- Online voting should be studied further to ensure that Elections Canada is 100% certain that the individual casting their ballot online is in fact who they say they are;
- Mandatory voting should be studied further to ensure those who are not mentally capable of voting are not unfairly penalized.

**Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform
(ERRE)**

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**Office of Larry Miller, MP
Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound
613-996-5191
Larry.miller.a2@parl.gc.ca**