The following is a summary of discussion at a town hall on electoral reform held on September 15, 2016 in the riding of Lac-Saint-Louis, with Member of Parliament Francis Scarpaleggia.

1. What did participants say about the current system for electing Members of Parliament (benefits/flaws)? Did participants feel that their votes are fairly translated?

Those who participated in the town hall claimed they are generally satisfied with the way our current electoral system functions. Participants cited the accountability that Members of Parliament (MPs) have to their ridings, simplicity, stability, and being "typically Canadian" as reasons why they support the current First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system.

Still, some of the flaws of FPTP that were mentioned included that it is not an appropriate electoral system for a country with more than two political parties, because, in that case, a candidate or party can win without a majority of the popular vote. Another flaw of FPTP frequently cited was the fact that our current electoral system allows parties with only regional support to hold a disproportionate number of seats and power in the House of Commons.

2. 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.)?

The majority of attendees who supported electoral reform cited Mixed-Member Proportional Representation (MMP) as their preferred alternative to the current electoral system because it combines local geographic representation with fairness in the form of a seat distribution that better reflects a party's popular vote. Those in favour of MMP, owing to its proportionality, noted that MMP is preferable to a system of pure Proportional Representation (PR) because PR could more likely allow parties representing narrow interests and ideologies to gain seats and influence in the legislature. Arguing against PR, some pointed to Israel and Italy as countries frequently in parliamentary deadlock and unable to pass legislation due to a tendency toward splintered legislatures with minority or coalition governments.

However, attendees were clear that they did not support a vast increase in the size of the Parliament, something that could be necessary to achieve proportionality under MMP. Another concern with MMP was that it could potentially lead to two classes of MPs — those with geographic seats and those elected from a party list. In the context of MMP, participants favoured closed-list MMP over the open-list version for reasons of simplicity. Namely, open-list MMP would increase the complexity of the system by multiplying voter choice.

Finally, those who addressed the Alternative Vote (AV) or the Single-Transferable Vote (STV) options were generally unfavourable to them based on the understanding that these systems would tend to benefit centrist parties. In other words, voters from both ends of the political spectrum could be expected to choose a centrist party as their second choice on the ballot.

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

Many of the town hall attendees suggested that one of the primary reasons why Canadian voter participation is so low is because many people do not feel that their vote matters or that it is reflected in how seats are allocated in the House of Commons. Others noted that there has been a general trend of declining voter turnout in the past few decades in nearly all Western liberal democracies and that voter apathy is not unique to Canada nor to FPTP as a voting system. Another reason cited for low voter participation was the feeling among the public that policies do not really change from government to government. In other words, voting results in little *de facto* change in the face of problems that appear intractable.

Some participants suggested that increasing the number of voting days could help improve voter turnout as many employers currently do not give their employees the legally-required four hours time off to cast their ballot. More voting days could also help reduce the long lineups at the voting station that can dissuade Canadians from casting a ballot. A simple voting system was also frequently highlighted as a way to ensure voter participation.

4. Did participants feel it should be necessary to cast a ballot?

Participants' opinions on mandatory voting were generally skewed against introducing it as part of electoral reform. Many felt that forcing people to vote would not fit with Canadian values of social freedom, claiming that as much as voting is a democratic right so too is the decision to abstain from voting altogether. Some also believed that mandatory voting would lead to "donkey-voting" — which, in a ranked ballot system, involves ranking candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot. In other words, the legal requirement to vote would not result in greater citizen engagement with the process or the issues.

It was also mentioned that other options, such as providing free taxi services to those with limited mobility in order to vote, could be more effective at enticing Canadians to the ballot box than mandatory voting. Some in attendance also noted that even despite introducing possible new convenience measures aimed at encouraging voter participation, there will always be those who simply choose note to vote.

Those who spoke in favour of mandatory voting invoked a parallel with the obligation for citizens to complete the census.

5. 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.)

The majority of participants did not support online voting, citing concern with vote secrecy and the potential for hacking of the system. However, it is worth noting that younger participants supported online voting as a valuable component of electoral reform. Some participants compared online voting to the ability for Canadians to pay their taxes online. Many who favoured online voting suggested it could increase the number of ballots cast (i.e. voter participation) by accommodating those who do not vote owing to mobility constraints or

school/work commitments. Online voting might also reduce the long queues at voting stations that currently can act to discourage some from casting their ballot.

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

Many participants called for a referendum to increase the democratic legitimacy of implementing any new voting system. Many consider that electoral reform would amount to one of the most important institutional changes in our democracy's history; hence, the need for popular validation of any new voting system. There were various suggestions on the subject of a potential referendum. Some suggested a referendum to decide whether the government should introduce voting reform at all. Others suggested that the committee's recommended alternative system be put to a popular vote.

On the other hand, many cited the recent Brexit vote as a warning against using referenda for deciding important, complex issues, and highlighted the divisive nature of referenda and their tendency to be "hijacked" by extraneous issues that render the final result about something very different than the original question on which the vote was called. Adding to the difficulty and complexity of using a referendum to legitimize any reform option is the fact that unlike on the issue of national unity, the Supreme Court of Canada has never weighed in on whether a simple majority would be sufficient to proceed with electoral reform. It was also mentioned that in a representative democracy like Canada's, voters choose qualified individuals to represent their values and interests and to make informed decisions on their behalf. Finally, some warned that referenda often result in the maintenance of the status quo.

Some attendees supported mandatory civic education in schools as a means of increasing youth voter turnout by lowering apathy through enhancing young people's understanding of the democratic process and current affairs.

Finally, it was agreed that no matter the kind of voting system chosen, it must reflect Canadian values.