Office of Bruce Stanton, MP (Simcoe North)

Electoral Reform Consultation Submission

Report on Simcoe North Electoral Reform Consultations to the Standing Committee on Electoral Reform

October 14, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa ON K1A 0A6

Dear ERRE Committee Chair Scarpaleggia,

Following the government's announcement that it would reform our federal electoral system, I organized a series of consultations in my riding of Simcoe North, including:

- Two public meetings
- Articles in local newspapers soliciting feedback
- Online on brucestantonmp.ca and my social media
- Through my Summer Householder

The consultations were framed around four main questions, and used the Library of Parliament's Background Paper *Electoral Systems and Electoral Reform in Canada and Elsewhere: An Overview* in order to provide people with general, unbiased information on our current electoral system, as well as systems used in other countries. My thanks to the Library of Parliament for this excellent paper – I received a considerable amount of positive feedback that it was very helpful.

The four questions I chose are:

1. Do you feel the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively? Why or why not?

2. Of the guiding principles the government has set out for Canadian federal electoral reform (effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity and local representation) what principles are most or least important to you, and why? Are there other principles that should be included?

3. What do you think are some of the strengths of our current federal electoral system? What are some of the weaknesses?

4. Are there electoral systems other than our current one, that you have heard about and believe would be suitable for Canada?

The following report reflects what I heard.

Sincerely,

Bruce Stanton, MP
Simcoe North

Electoral Reform Consultation Submission:

General Comments and Observations:

It was clear that many had put a great deal of time, effort and thought into reflecting on and answering the questions I posed, and I sincerely appreciate that. However, it was also clear that this issue had limited resonance among people who were not active in political associations, campaigns or movements. This was particularly evident at the town hall meetings, where one attendee at the Midland meeting noted that they recognized most of the faces as members of the board for the various Electoral District Associations in Simcoe North.

This may reflect a lack of understanding of issues around electoral reform, a general disengagement from politics, or that electoral reform simply isn't a pressing concern in the minds of some. Whatever the reason, this indifference is certainly not unique to discussions of electoral reform; it is evident in many issues that don't necessarily have an impact on people's day-to-day lives. Indeed, this is one of the challenges that electoral reform aims to address.

Among the feedback I received, there was no consensus beyond that we should try to improve our electoral system. This is not necessarily surprising as I chose the questions I did to provoke a broader, more substantive dialogue on what Canadians want and expect from their electoral system.

I've organized this report around the four questions I used to frame my consultation, and begin by detailing the general tone of the feedback before turning to specific comments and suggestions. At the end, under Additional Comments, I've included feedback that didn't necessarily fit into the four questions, but that nevertheless deserves the consideration of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform. At the end I provide some concluding remarks.

Feedback to Questions:

1. Do you feel the House of Commons represents Canadians effectively? Why or why not?

The responses to this question were the most straightforward: No, the current system does not effectively represent Canadians. We heard this is in large part because of the power of political parties, as well as the Prime Minister/Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and also because of disparities that are exacerbated by how Canada's population is divided – it takes far fewer Canadians to elect an MP in Prince Edward Island than it does in Ontario.

This question also raised interesting issues around what it means to be represented in Parliament: does it mean you agree with your Member of Parliament (MP) 100% of the time? If not, how many times could an MP vote contrary to your wishes before you can claim you aren't being represented? Such questions get to the heart of what our electoral system should be designed around.

Returning to the matter at hand, the following were specific comments I received on this question.

Yes, the House of Commons effectively represents me because:

- It is a mistake to look at national poll numbers and expect the House of Commons to resemble them, because we don't have one election, we have 338.
- Yes. The ridings if properly divided provide representation by population of citizens qualified to vote, which is a tradition in the Commonwealth developed over centuries, and is elastic enough to represent conservative views, socialist views and a liberal view.
- Generally I think it does, but the strict adherence to party lines on votes tends to dilute the influence of local representatives. However, at times the behaviour in parliament is rather un-Canadian, lacking civility.
- Our present parliamentary system represents majority opinion – democracy is not a system unduly controlled by a minority of voters.

No, the House of Commons does not effectively represent me because:

- The current House of Commons seems to represent more densely populated areas more than rural areas
- The current system produces a House of Commons that does not reflect the popular vote.
- In a riding like Simcoe North, which has alternated between Liberal and Conservative MP's, supporters of other parties don't feel as though their vote has an impact or is represented. Indeed, a number of people commented that they felt like their vote had never counted.
- The current system makes it too difficult for new parties to translate their votes into seats.
- There is too great of a distortion in terms of how many votes it takes to elect an MP from the different parties (e.g. The Liberal's elected an MP for every 38,000 votes; the Green Party elected an MP for every 603,000 votes it received)
- The House of Commons has not been fully effective because too many voters have no input. There is a tendency for a Prime Minister to act dictatorially, ignoring the wishes of Parliament.
- It worked fine when we only had two parties, but we've evolved beyond that point.

- The spectrum of occupational categories represented in Parliament is too heavily weighted towards lawyers. Need scientists, doctors and engineers.
- The allocation of seats in the current Parliament, in no way reflects or mirrors the actual voter intentions.
- I think that there is a discrepancy when it comes to representation by population. I'm not sure how that can be resolved given the vast range of population over large geographic areas. While the some urban centres have large populations and hence what appears to be adequate parliamentary representation, smaller communities (by population) with larger geographic territory get less representation. As a result it would appear that issues in more rural parts of Canada gets less attention. I find that I get my back up when substantial Federal funds are directed towards urban transit issues that have next to no impact on me.
- Not really. 1. It has been shown historically from both parties, that a riding having an MP of the ruling party, they do occasionally receive "favours". 2. A riding that does have an MP from the ruling party, and this may sound strange, can be at a disadvantage. When it comes time to pass a bill, that MP must support his leader, even though it doesn't necessarily work for their constituency.
- No, the current system is more analogous to a lottery than an election.
- No, they spend too much money.
- Constitutional guarantees, like the "senatorial clause" (all provinces get as many seats in the House as they get in the Senate), mean some regions are significantly overrepresented based on their population (PEI, the Territories), at the expense of more populous provinces.

2. *Of the guiding principles the government has set out for Canadian federal electoral reform (effectiveness and legitimacy, engagement, accessibility and inclusiveness, integrity and local representation) what principles are most or least important to you, and why? Are there other principles that should be included?*

By and large, people agreed with the guiding principles the government outlined. Additional suggestions included: openness and honesty, proportional representation, pan-Canadian interest, and affordability.

The following are specific comments I received on this question.

Most/Least Important Principles:

- Engagement is perhaps the most important principle, as the health of our representative government is measured by how engaged its citizens are with the political process.
- Effectiveness and legitimacy are the most important. Without legitimacy, the outcomes are open to corruption and lack fairness, leading to citizens no longer respecting government or the tradition of doing what is in the long-term public-interest versus short-term self-interest. Because the decisions of representative government are viewed to be fair, particularly difficult choices which may be unpopular, the government can be more effective.
- Accessibility and inclusiveness are non-issues in Canada as all citizens can vote equally (protected already in the Charter), and outreach programs encourage disadvantaged persons or those outside of Canada (travelling or working legitimately) to still vote.
- Integrity and local representation are a challenge in Canada. Urban areas are over-represented; more rural and less populated areas don't feel like their views are being taken into consideration by the government.
- The notions of legitimacy, engagement, accessibility, inclusiveness, integrity and local representation just seem like moral grandstanding. I'm not sure what the government is trying to imply by legitimacy. Perhaps gerrymandering, which is a non-issue because of the impartial manner in which our electoral districts are established. Elections are basically the only form of political engagement citizens can partake in, and they have always been accessible, and never excluded any Canadian citizen who actually wants to cast a vote. Local representation is achieved by voting for your MP of choice rather than your PM of choice.
- Integrity and effectiveness are the most important; local representation is the least important.
- Effectiveness and legitimacy, and integrity and local representation would be most, and the others to follow.
- Honestly, I'm not sure what these even really mean. They strike me as buzzwords for the most part. What I am most concerned with is a system that actually allows my voice to truly be heard. A system that doesn't force me to choose which beliefs I want to promote this election cycle, at the expense of others. A system that will allow me to help send someone to Ottawa who truly represents all of my opinions.
- These principles seem to me to relate more to governance than electoral reform but yes I want to see the reforms as effective, not just window dressing. The process should engage the populace, but as said it is not a very sexy topic. Accessibility and inclusiveness are the essence of

consultation and the process needs to hear the voices of Canadians from all regions and walks of life.
- In the end, I would like to see an electoral system that put more emphasis on the local representative than any national party or personality. Ultimately I would like to see a process that would result in independent candidates being elected to parliament. Let them then elect our countries prime minister."
- Another principle is that every vote should count, or, put another way, every vote should count towards electing a representative.
- All of the principles are important. Most important, perhaps, is engagement. Too many Canadians, especially youth, are not engaged in the political process, and may not even vote.
- Effectiveness is the least important principle – the most effective government is a military dictatorship; being effective isn't enough.
- Engagement: increased voter turnout is an indicator of a better democracy.

Other Principles:

- One principle that should be taken into consideration is affordability
- Proportional representation should be a guiding principle to make every vote count
- Pan-Canadian interests: decisions are frequently made which favour a region or special interest group, compromising the interests and advancement of the country as a whole
- The only principles to consider in electoral reform are its (the proposed alternative's) effectiveness in comparison to our current system. By effectiveness, I mean the ability of a voting system to elect strong, accountable governments in a democratic, representative manner. A thorough exploration, by debate, into the comparative strengths and weaknesses must be considered.
- Openness and honesty should be added.
- Proportional representation, making every vote count, removes incentive to vote strategically.
- The principle of democracy is all citizens are included, all are equal before the law, all have access to representatives, without any individual or minority group holding sway over the majority.

3. *What do you think are some of the strengths of our current federal electoral system? What are some of the weaknesses?*

If we are proceeding from the understanding that issues like declining voter turnout, and voter disengagement, are the product of, or being exacerbated by, our current electoral system, it is critical to first identify its strengths and weaknesses. The new electoral system should aim to retain the current system's strengths, while addressing its weaknesses.

Many of the same themes emerged as was the case with the responses to Question 1: concern with the power of political parties and the PMO, and the disparity between the number of votes a party gets and the number of seats they receive. The one strength that came up regularly was the local representation. People appreciate having a representative who is familiar with and can speak to the issues they deal with in their own community.

The following are specific comments I received on this question.

Strengths:

- The first-past-the-post system generally produces effective majority governments.
- Greater accountability of elected governments, as citizens can easily identify the policies espoused by the parties, and you know what you get by voting for the parties (with some room for "protest votes" for emerging candidates).
- It creates a strong government and a strong opposition. This makes government more accountable.
- It provides local representation through the MP.
- It is very simple and easy to understand.
- Smaller, fringe/extremist parties have a hard time establishing themselves.
- We have a good federal electoral system compared with most of the world. It's democratic and fair, and compared to the current circus in the US, relatively clean, honest and well-run.
- The main strength is effectiveness – a bias encouraging Canadians to vote for one of the two or three main parties, which tends to lead to effective majority governments.
- I really don't like the current system. If I had to find one strength for it, I would say the level of local representation would be it. When I lived in the US, my representative in Congress represented 600,000 people, across an area of 25,000 square km. Here, my MP represents a population and area an order of magnitude smaller. I consider that to be a good thing. While many issues are national in scope, some are very local. I don't have to battle for your attention with other constituents 200 miles away who have no reason to care about some local issue in my town.
- One of the greatest strengths of our current system is how little time our elected officials spend fundraising. A former Minister noted he spent about 2% of his time on fundraising. This stands in stark contrast to the US, where House members need to raise an average of $2,315 each day, and Senators need to raise an average of $14,351 in order to finance their re-election campaigns.
- When a party is defeated, they begin the process of rebuilding and renewal, which is healthy.
- The present system meets the criteria in Question 2. All citizens have a voice, a voice that is heard but no minority can presently control the system as is presently the case in proportional states such as Israel.

- Our character as Canadians – most evident when juxtaposed with the political climate in the US

Weaknesses:

- Not a true representation of how Canadians voted.
- A small proportion of the electorate can decide who leads the country.
- Too many people feel their vote doesn't/won't have an impact on the outcome, and as a result, choose not to get involved in politics or vote.
- Makes it too difficult for new parties to break the stranglehold of the existing parties; parties can receive a respectable percent of the total vote without gaining seats (for instance, the Green Party of Canada).
- Regional-based parties, like the Bloc Quebecois, have too much influence over national issues, with paltry national support.
- The current system is not representative. It is not fair. It is not democratic. Minorities have no say.
- Current system had led to a two-party state, which stifles political discourse.
- Prone to strategic voting, which punishes parties like the NDP.
- The biggest weakness in our system is that the parties and their leader overshadow the values of the local candidate. The way that our current system operates we may as well just cast a vote for the PM.
- The main weakness is that many people feel their vote is useless, so they disengage from politics and often do not vote.
- Not all votes are equal (depending on where you live) or effective (they elect no one)
- Lobbyists and pollsters have too much influence.
- Party leaders become too isolated from their grassroots.
- Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has too much power.
- Political parties have too much power.
- The distortion between the number of votes a party received and the number of seats they have in the House of Commons is a disincentive for people to get out and vote.
- Our current system is ineffective, as governments generally focus on undoing, or redoing, the policies of their predecessor, losing sight of the bigger picture and longer-term planning.
- Canadian citizens under the age of 18 have to pay taxes, and above the age of 14 can join political parties and vote on the party leader and local candidate, but aren't allowed to vote in an election.

4. *Are there electoral systems other than our current one, that you have heard about and believe would be suitable for Canada?*

There was considerable support for different variations of Proportional Representation (PR) (save for those where a party controls the list of candidates), as well as for Ranked Ballots and Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP). The systems used in Australia, Germany, New Zealand and Holland were often cited as good models for Canada's new federal electoral system. Italy, Israel and the United States (US) were mentioned as models Canada should try to avoid.

Other systems that garnered some, albeit less, support included first-past-the-post, the Borda count (see brief explanation below), and a unique proposed system wherein all candidates who run for office and receive votes get a seat in the House of Commons.

The following are specific comments I received on this question.

- Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) seems to address shortcomings with the current system in terms of ensuring representation for rural areas, though the increased number of MP's under an MMP system would be a more expensive system.
- Ranked Ballot: removes strategic voting, encourages greater cooperation and civility among parties. It may also reduce negative campaigning.
- The form of Proportional Representation that has worked in other jurisdictions, that are most similar to Canada, should be implemented in Canada.
- Any Proportional Representation system should have a minimum vote threshold so that extreme parties can't gain a foothold.
- Against Proportional Representation: The pizza parliaments in Europe truly leave citizens with no clear view of what their coalition government will look like or its policies, which are cobbled together after the election through deal-making. Just look at Italy and Israel.
- Against Proportional Representation: PR is a recipe for constant turmoil and pandering to small, extremist parties, not to mention gridlock and short-lived governments.
- Against Proportional Representation: The House will become a continual battleground full of deal-making compromises and it will stagnate our democracy.
- Against US System: Opens challenges when the President and Congress are controlled by different parties, leading to excessive vetoing and dysfunctional governance.
- Against US System: The American checks and balances approach would promote ideological battles and wasteful horse trading and result in gridlock and inertia.
- Australia and Germany.
- Holland and Germany.
- Against New Zealand MMP: Canada and New Zealand are too different for us to use them as a model. Too many fringe parties gaining outsized influence.
- Against Ranked Ballot: Many voters either have no second choice, or don't want to be represented by their second choice.
- Against Ranked Ballot: a ranked ballot would unduly benefit the Liberal Party.
- Single Transferrable Vote with multi-member constituencies (e.g. Ireland) – the system seemed effective at converting voters will into a government and people seemed to find it easy to understand.

- No system with party lists.
- Keep first-past-the-post. If it ain't broke, don't fix it.
- Borda count system for elections and government (*in the Borda count system, candidates are ranked on a ballot – in a hypothetical race with four candidates, each candidate would receive 1 point for every ballot they are ranked last, 2 points for every ballot they are ranked second last, 3 points for every ballot they are ranked second, and four points for every ballot they are ranked first. The candidate with the highest score wins*).
- Electoral system must respect majority opinion and direction otherwise there is no democracy.
- Every candidate who runs and receives votes in an election should be given a seat in the House of Commons (in 2015, there were 1,792 candidates), and have a vote proportional to the share of the vote they received – if you received 40% of the vote in a riding, you'd have 0.4 votes in Parliament.
- Don't use any minimum vote threshold, because if you do, you are depriving some voters of having their vote count.
- We should have a 'made in Canada' system in place for the next election.
- I'm intrigued by Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP). It would be more expensive to have more MP's, but I've always wondered if there's been too much for too few MP's.
- I don't endorse any electoral system that elects MPs that have 90K electors (like Simcoe North) at the same time elects MPs from Nunavut (with 20K electors). How can I say my vote is equal to a voter from NU? I don't like an electoral system where my vote can elect an MP, but the voter across the street (in another riding) vote will not, even though they voted for a candidate representing the same political party?
- I believe the ranked ballot (instant run-off or single-transferrable voting) will best serve Canadian democracy. It will avoid many of the weaknesses of first-past-the-post system, especially strategic voting, while maintaining the most important aspects, namely accountability through the formation of strong governments. Furthermore, it will generate new parties, and stimulate political discourse.
- Though it can be confusing at first, I believe the ranked ballot (instant run-off, or single-transferrable ballot) will best serve Canadian democracy. It will avoid many of the weaknesses of first-past-the-post, especially strategic voting, while maintaining the most important aspects, namely accountability through the formation of strong governments. Furthermore, it will generate new parties and stimulate political discourse. I believe it is instantly better than proportional representation, which is much, much worse than our current system. It turns fringe parties into kingmakers, and is susceptible to corruption, and prevents governments from being held accountable for their actions, and strong governments will not be formed.

Additional Feedback:

There were a number of comments and suggestions of improvements that could be made to our democracy more generally, including on things such as electronic voting, mandatory voting, lowering the voting age, and campaign and political financing. All of these areas merit careful consideration in conjunction with the work on identifying a new voting system.

- Make Election Day a national holiday, as is the case with Puerto Rico, and turn it into a celebration of our democracy.
- Voting should not be extended to non-citizens or Permanent Residents, as they have not made the same personal investment, commitment and demonstration they can integrate through shared values and appreciation of national institutional systems.
- The Canadian federal judiciary and Supreme Court of Canada should also be elected in the same manner as parliamentarians.
- The electoral reform process needs to be done in the same non-partisan manner as we do electoral boundary redistricting. A vote along party lines in the House of Commons or the ERRE committee is the worst possible outcome.
- Do not allow electronic voting, as it is too susceptible to being hijacked.
- Allow electronic voting to make it easier for people to participate in elections.
- Don't just reform the electoral system, reform our democracy so the PMO cannot control the country as we've seen in recent years.
- Don't be restricted by artificial timelines. The government should take the time it needs to do electoral reform right.
- When you look at the incredible discord in US politics, with the House, Senate and Presidency divided between the two parties, it is clear that we need to devise a system that will support good ideas, regardless of what party they come from.
- All MP's need to recognize they are responsible for representing everyone in their riding, and be open to engaging with supporters and non-supporters alike.
- Senate needs to be reformed at the same time.
- Implement compulsory voting.
- Ban media from reporting results until all polls are closed – gives people on the West Coast an unfair advantage.
- Against Mandatory Voting: A person has the right not to vote and not voting does indeed send a message.
- The government and the ERRE committee need to set clear timelines for implementing electoral reform. Government doesn't move very fast, and whether you give it two months or two years, they will take all the time they're given to reach a decision.
- Increase the powers of Elections Canada
- Longer writ periods, no more fixed election dates, reinstate the per-vote subsidy
- Local independent candidates elected to a parliament where they all have equal voice and are not restricted by party lines. They would elect the PM who would speak on behalf of parliament and the country.
- Ballots should have a "None of the Above" option, and voters should be allowed to refuse their ballot, as they are able to do in Ontario provincial elections.

- The Chief Electoral Officer of Canada needs to understand that campaigns are run by volunteers who are not likely well-versed in the minutiae of electoral laws and regulations. There should be an oversight committee with party officials to rein in the Chief Electoral Officer.
- We need to free our MP's from the party whip to a greater degree, such as they have in the United Kingdom (UK).
- There should be reforms to the power of political parties as well, including removing the ability of parties to veto or parachute in a candidate.
- We need to do much better when it comes to educating youth on politics and government, to instill the importance of these things at an early age.
- This process should not be limited by any artificial timelines: take the time to do it right.
- No to more government and more cost: do whatever you want, just don't have more than 338 MP's or spend more money than is currently being spent on parliament.
- We should borrow from the German's: German coalitions have legal agreements on what policies the government will proceed with, and people are able to sue the government if they don't keep to the agreement.
- The goal of democratic reform should not be perfection, since a perfect solution, for this issue does not exist. Parliamentarians must concentrate on finding pragmatic and attainable ways to improve Canada's democratic institutions, by removing characteristics and outcomes we don't want, those defects and barriers that prevents us achieving our electoral reform goals.
- Cost shouldn't be taken into consideration. Whatever the system costs, it costs. That's the price of democracy.
- The Senate should become an elected body, or be disbanded.
- The ERRE Committee has to explain how it settles on its recommendation, showing how each of the systems uphold the guiding principles the government has outlined.
- The ERRE Committee must establish an evaluation rubric that is clear, concise and understandable by all Canadians.
- The ERRE Committee should delegate issues such as lowering the voting age, electronic voting, mandatory voting, and campaign finance reform to the Procedure and House Affairs Committee (PROC).
- The voting age should be dropped to 14, the same age at which you can join a political party.
- Donations should be limited to $100 per person, per term. The vote subsidy should be reinstated and increased.
- Campaign finance legislation should be reformed to allow independent candidates to fundraise and issue tax receipts outside of elections.
- We should introduce young Canadians to voting similar to how they are introduced to driving: in a graduated process.

On a Referendum:

The question of whether a referendum should be held to have Canadians approve whether to adopt a new electoral system provoked strong feelings on all sides: those who think a referendum is necessary; those who don't; and, those who think there should be referendum, but only after a couple of cycles under the new system. Attendees at the Midland town hall meeting were notably supportive of a referendum only after two or three cycles under the new system. On the whole, though, the feedback I received was evenly split between whether a referendum was necessary or not.

To be clear, it is not a questions of whether the government has the ability to pass electoral reform without a referendum. It clearly does. The question is whether a change of this magnitude or nature should be approved by a referendum.

New Zealand was often cited as a potential model if a referendum were held. In that case, a non-binding referendum was held in 1992 asking two questions: 1. Whether they wanted to replace first-past-the-post with a new voting system. This passed 84.7% to 15.3%. 2. Which new system they would like to adopt (Mixed-Member Proportional, Single Transferrable Vote, Supplementary Member or Alternative Vote). 64.95% chose Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP).

A second referendum was held in 1993, asking whether to retain first-past-the-post or adopt MMP. MMP was adopted with 53.86% support. This was followed by a third referendum in 2011 on whether to retain MMP, which passed with 56.17%.

No, a referendum is not necessary:

- I believe referendums should be very rare, and even avoided, and related to only the most important issues that relate to the sovereignty of the country and its citizens. They are expensive, but more importantly, they often undermine parliamentary sovereignty and stifle parliamentary debate. I vehemently disagree with Prime Minister Trudeau when he said "…they know that the fact is that referendums are a pretty good way of not getting any electoral reform." Referendums, on the contrary are a great way for the uninformed and misinformed to pass legislation.
- No referendum at the beginning of the process. Only after 2 or 3 cycles.
- A referendum is a bad idea. Knowing how complicated this area is, I agree that our elected representatives, along with experts, can make the best decision.
- Just look at what happened with the Brexit vote. People make poor decisions based on false and misleading information, and don't realize what they've done until it's too late.
- We didn't hold a referendum when we've made changes in the past, such as extending the voting franchise, so there's no reason to now.
- People want to test drive a new system before deciding whether to adopt it. Only have a referendum after people have had a chance to try it.
- We elect MP's to make decisions like this for us.

Yes, a referendum is necessary:

- Don't use a broken system, with a government that got less than 40% of the vote, to fix another broken system, our electoral system.
- Canadians deserve to have their say on a change this fundamental
- If Canadians could understand and vote on the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, they can understand and vote on electoral reform.
- We need to establish the precedent that a change of this nature requires a referendum. Otherwise, a future government could go and unilaterally change it back.
- While it is true that changing the electoral system was included in the Liberal's campaign platform, it wasn't one of the key issues. Given that the Liberal's campaigned on maximum yearly deficits of $10 billion, and turned around in their first budget with an almost $30 billion deficit, it doesn't seem like campaign platforms are sacrosanct in any event.

- The ERRE committee should make a recommendation on an alternative system to first-past-the-post, and put it to Canadians to have their say. This must include a strong educational component – this was conspicuously absent in the Ontario referendum on electoral reform in 2007.

Concluding Remarks:

In this report, I've done my best to communicate what I heard, as opposed to editorializing and promoting a specific view. There were, nevertheless, two key themes that really resonated with me at the town hall meetings and in the feedback I received: that this needs to be dealt with in a non-partisan manner, and that the government may wish to take the time it needs to get the best electoral system for Canada.

It was apparent to me, from those I heard from, that this process goes, or should go, beyond party/partisan interest. A worst-case outcome, in this respect, would be one where the ERRE committee, or the House of Commons, becomes split along party lines. Canadians rightly take pride that we do things like electoral boundary redistricting in an impartial manner, which stands in stark contrast to the gerrymandering that you see in the United States. Deciding on electoral reform needs to be a similarly non-partisan exercise to give Canadians assurance that the best electoral system has been chosen, or ratified, rather than one that unduly benefits a specific party.

Second, the government might benefit from a less restricted timeline. I heard that they should take the time to do electoral reform right. We are already too close to the next election to implement some potential voting systems. The government may wish to put the best options on the table, and take the time that's necessary to identify and implement the electoral system that Canadians have identified as the best for our country. This will undoubtedly need the engagement of a large segment of the public; and considerably more than those who participated in this past summer's consultations. This will take time.

I would like to thank everyone who took time to share their views on this important topic, and the ERRE Committee for their review and consideration of these findings.

Bruce Stanton, M.P.
Simcoe North