

**BORYS WRZESNEWSKYJ, MP**  
**ETOBICOKE CENTRE**

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



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
 CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
 CANADA

**BORYS WRZESNEWSKYJ, DÉPUTÉ**  
**ETOBICOKE CENTRE**

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

| <b>CONSULTATION(S)</b>  |  |                                 |   |
|---|--|---------------------------------|---|
| <b>Date(s) of the Meeting(s)</b>  | <b>Time and Length (start time and end time)</b> | <b>Location of Consultation</b> | <b>Total Number of People in Attendance (you may indicate the number of volunteers and employees who assisted with the meeting)</b> |
| 1. August 17  | 7pm to 9pm                                       | Etobicoke Civic Centre          | 37  |
| 2. July 12 – August 30  | n/a  | Written submissions / Emails    | 12  |
| 3. July 3 – August 30   | n/a  | Phone calls from constituents   | 12  |
| 4.  |  |                                 |   |
| <b>Form:</b> X Use of the Library of Parliament’s visual presentation<br>X Presentation from the MP’s office<br><input type="checkbox"/> Open microphone<br>X Question and answer session<br><input type="checkbox"/> Guest speaker<br>X Other (please specify): roundtable working groups, written submissions, phone calls and messages |  |                                 |   |
| <b>SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (summary)</b>   |  |                                 |   |
| Voting systems: X   | Replacement of the current voting system: X      | Voter turnout: X                | Accessibility and inclusiveness: X  |
| Mandatory voting: X   | Online voting: X                                 | Local representation: X         | Other (please specify and describe below): X<br><br>Referendum, “Sunset” clause or trial period.                                    |

**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)**

About one third of respondents expressed support for the current First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) system. Although nearly two thirds of respondents expressed support for replacing the current

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*Deadline: Friday, October 14, 2016*

system, of those, some did indicate that the current system would be their second preference.

Among those who wished to see the current system replaced, many felt that the current system is unfair to smaller parties and discourages voter turnout as some people feel that their vote “won’t count”. Among those who supported the current system, some did acknowledge that the current system is unfair to smaller parties. However, those who preferred the current system indicated a preference for majority government and for the stability the system provides. One respondent noted that “with a majority government you know which party is accountable and if things go wrong you can kick them out. It’s harder to pin problems on a government formed from multiple parties compromising like in [sic] proportional systems.” One respondent, while acknowledging the flaws in the current system, cautioned that change would come with both risks and unintended consequences. The simplicity of the current system was seen by some as a positive. One respondent indicated that voters should “pick one candidate from the ballot because you have to study less people [sic] and can make yourself familiar with MPs more easily.”

**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)**

There was wide support for various other electoral systems. Many of the respondents indicated they would support some type of system that used a ranked ballot “because second opinions get counted and votes don’t become wasted”. While some respondents indicated a preference for Proportional Representation from a party list, a clear majority of respondents expressed a preference for locally elected candidates. A blended parliament was suggested, with a proportion elected locally and a portion from a party list; proportions suggested included 50% elected locally and 50% from a party list or 60% elected locally and 40% from a party list. Numerous respondents indicated that constituencies should have a single Member because “Canadians are more accustomed to one representative and it’s easier to hold the MP accountable if there is only one.” However, one respondent expressed an interest in having a “district with 1 or 2 MPs because it is nice to have cooperation but more than 2 would create complications”.

Feedback on Electoral Systems:

**Alternative Vote (Ranked-ballot single member constituency):**

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Several respondents expressed a preference for this system. One strength that respondents noted was that this system could still produce majority governments if a party won enough first and second place votes. Another strength of the system identified was that it promotes consensus candidates who are able to appeal as the first or second preferences of more than 50% of voters. It was described as a system which “unite[s] us, not divide[s] us into many small parties”. Some of those who support the current system indicated this system as a second preference and vice versa. This system would also ensure locally elected candidates. Feedback on this system was positive from those who discussed it; however, some groups of respondents did not provide feedback on this system. One respondent noted that in a referendum on adopting this system, British Columbians rejected this voting system.

**Single Transferrable Vote (Ranked-ballot multi-member constituency):**

Several respondents expressed a preference for this type of system. Two respondents indicated that they were very interested to see the Canadian Senate elected using this type of system as in Australia. One respondent expressed concern regarding “above the line” voting for a single party roster rather than having to vote for individual candidates stating: “such a feature (above-the-line) is rare and contrary to the very spirit of the STV which is to choose at the candidate level from a field of candidates that includes several candidates from each party”. Other respondents considered this system in their discussions and noted benefits including greater proportionality of representatives and the possibility of local representation. However, several respondents were unsure of how many seats should be available in each constituency should the system be adopted for the House of Commons; they worried that if the number of seats was small then the proportionality benefit for smaller parties could be lost, but that if the number of seats was large then the locality benefit would be lost. Most groups of respondents did not provide feedback on this system.

**Proportional Representation (Open and Closed List):**

This was the most controversial of the voting systems; while numerous respondents favoured or strongly favoured this system the majority of respondents directly opposed one or more features of

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this system and some respondents were hostile towards this system. One respondent indicated that it would be best to “vote for [a] political party instead of [an] individual because policy is derived from the party as opposed to individual candidates”. Another indicated that a “PR system would make it easier to elect members that reflect Canada’s diversity”. Respondents indicated they liked the proportionality feature of this system and that all votes would count. Of the respondents in favour of proportional representation, more preferred open-list to closed-list voting to encourage accountability of individual candidates. However, those who supported the system recommended various thresholds to qualify for seat allocation including 5%, 10%, and 15%. Several respondents felt the system would be divisive and result in a parliament comprised of too many political parties and a lack of political accountability. A few respondents spoke unfavourably about their experiences in Israel and Ukraine respectively with proportional representation and one noted that Ukraine abandoned this system in favour of a Mixed-Member system. Several respondents expressed concern about the use of party lists and the selection of candidates and how Members would be “representatives of the party rather than representatives of the people”. The lack of local representatives was mentioned by many respondents as a negative aspect of this system.

**Mixed-Member System (Majority and Proportional):**

Several respondents indicated a preference for a Mixed-Member system. While two respondents preferred a mixed-member majority system because it offered majority government, most who liked this type preferred a mixed-member proportional system. Respondents saw this system as providing all the benefits of proportional representation but with having local candidates which the majority of respondents wanted. One respondent indicated that it would mean Canadians would “live under legitimate laws approved by a majority of elected Parliamentarians representing a majority of voters.” There was disagreement among respondents regarding how the proportional members should be selected. One respondent wanted a First-Past-The-Post vote for constituency seats with the party affiliation of the local candidates used to determine each party’s vote share for proportionality. Other respondents indicated that there should be two separate ballots, one for the local candidate and one for the proportional allocation so that Canadians can “vote for both party and individual candidates because it allows for better representation; you can vote for the candidate

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you prefer as well as the party platform you agree most with.” One respondent indicated that the vote for individual candidates should take place using Alternative voting / ranked ballot. Several constituents expressed concern about the selection of the “list candidates” for the proportional seats believing that, as with proportional representation, the list candidates would be accountable to their party first and not accountable to voters. One respondent suggested that a party’s proportional seats should be filled by the party’s former MPs who were no longer representing a constituency. Another respondent suggested that a party’s proportional seats should be filled by its defeated candidates from the constituency elections thereby ensuring that only candidates selected by local riding associations would become MPs. Some respondents who supported proportional representation indicated that this system would be their second preference, though some indicated it would not be. Other than concerns about how the proportional representatives would be selected, no negative feedback was received about this voting system and several respondents indicated that they appreciated the compromise design of the system blending elements of proportional representation with a system of locally elected representatives. Of the voting systems considered, this system generated the most discussion and feedback. One respondent noted that voters in both Ontario and Prince Edward Island have rejected adopting this voting system in referenda.

**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)**

Several participants indicated they believed that the current FPTP system discouraged voting, particularly among those who held political views espoused by minor parties with no hope of election under the current system. They felt that because “some votes don’t count as much as others” some people won’t bother. These respondents supported either changing to Alternative Voting or changing to Proportional Representation so that each person’s vote would count and so it would encourage more people to turn out to vote.

However, other respondents did not believe the current voting system was the cause of declining voter participation and indicated that it is an international trend affecting many countries with many voting systems. They indicated that mistrust of politicians, apathy towards politics, and a belief that “our everyday lives are going to be about the same regardless of which party is in

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government” were underlying concerns driving lower voter turnout and that simply changing to a new voting system would not address these problems. Several of these respondents were unsure what measures, other than mandatory voting, could improve voter turnout, but did not believe that changing the voting system would have much impact as the current voting system was not the root cause of declining voter turnout.

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

Numerous respondents felt that mandatory voting, as is practised in Australia, would improve voter turnout as well as civic engagement generally. A few respondents were not in favour of mandatory voting as they felt it would infringe on a citizen’s right to choose not to vote. One respondent felt that the option of spoiling a ballot was not sufficient because freedom to not vote entails freedom to choose not to show up at the polling station at all.

Although the number of respondents in favour of mandatory voting was greater than the number who opposed mandatory voting, numerous respondents expressed no opinion on the issue and so it cannot necessarily be said that a majority would support mandatory voting. Several participant supporters of mandatory voting felt that, should mandatory voting be implemented, the ballot should have the option of voting “none of the above” so that even though citizens would be required to attend the poll they would not be required to cast a vote in favour of a candidate or candidates with whom they did not agree.

**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)**

Although one respondent indicated that they would be in favour of online voting, most respondents who commented on this issue were strongly opposed. Objections to online voting included concerns about cyber-terrorism and fraud, and respondents considered the risk to the integrity of the voting system to be too high. One respondent also felt that online voting was less engaging than the traditional method of voting and that people would think more carefully about their choice if they had to take the time to attend a polling station. Some respondents suggested that the number

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of advance polling days could be increased, that election dates should be held only on weekends, or that the date of a general election be declared a public holiday as these methods would provide more opportunities for citizens to vote. One respondent suggested that the next election be held in September rather than in October as the weather would be nicer, encouraging more people to go to the polling station.

On the issue of voting age, respondents expressed a variety of views. Many respondents suggested that the voting age be reduced to 16 while many others suggested that it remain at 18. Those who felt it should be lowered highlighted that students learn civics at age 16 and it would increase voter engagement because by voting young they will hopefully learn to keep up the practice. Some respondents also noted that we trust 16 year olds to drive and, of all potential voters, they have the longest yet to live and thus the greatest stake in the future of the country; therefore, they should have the right to vote. Those who opposed reducing the voting age highlighted that 18 years of age is the legal age at which a person is considered an adult and that young persons may not have accumulated sufficient life experience to make informed decisions about their voting choice. Some respondents feared that young voters would not take voting seriously and would choose protest parties “for fun” or “one that seems cool” rather making a serious choice about how they would like to see the country governed. One respondent suggested that the voting age be lowered to 17 rather than 16 and a few respondents suggested it be raised to 20 from the current 18.

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

The issue of a referendum on a new voting system is very divisive in our constituency. Some respondents insist that a referendum must be held while others are deeply opposed to holding a referendum. Among those who support holding a referendum, arguments include:

1. It is both a national and international precedent to hold a referendum when considering changes to the voting system as has been done in British Columbia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island, as well as in Italy, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.
2. Although the Liberal Party promised electoral reform in its election manifesto, it did not

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propose any particular type of system so although the mandate is present to advocate for electoral reform and undertake the current exercise, there is no mandate to decide on behalf of Canadians to adopt one specific voting system as an alternative. Voting in favour of the general idea of having electoral reform is not the same as voting in favour of a specific alternative.

3. Changing the voting system was a relatively minor part of the Liberal Party's electoral platform and many Canadians voted for the current government for other aspects of its program, not necessarily this one and so you cannot infer that all those who voted for the current government actually want electoral reform.
4. Voters in British Columbia, Ontario, and Prince Edward Island have all recently rejected proposals to change the voting system by large margins and so changing the system is not necessarily what the majority of Canadians want.

Among those who oppose holding a referendum, arguments include:

1. Both the Liberal and NDP platforms included pledges to implement electoral reform and recent polls show that a majority of Canadians want electoral reform.
2. Many voters are naturally hesitant of change and because they have no experience with another voting system, would vote against a change out of fear, uncertainty, or lack of experience or understanding of the benefits that a new electoral system would bring. Parliament has a duty to show leadership in this regard.
3. Members of Parliament are representatives of the people and their purpose is to make decisions on behalf of their constituents. We have a representative system of government and so MPs have the authority to decide this matter for Canadians.
4. Referenda on electoral reform have generally produced a negative vote, so even though Canadians want electoral reform, a referendum would not necessarily deliver it to them.
5. Holding a separate referendum would be expensive.

Several respondents indicated interest in a "sunset clause" for a potential change to the voting system, running two or three elections using the new system and then automatically switching back to the FPTP system unless the new system is specifically endorsed by Canadians at that time. In

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this way, Canadians could experience a new system and learn firsthand about its advantages and disadvantages prior to having to decide permanently on a change.

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

There is little consensus among the people of Etobicoke Centre as to what changes, if any should be made to the electoral system. Respondents were divided over what type of voting system should be used, over what age citizens should gain the right to vote, over whether or not voting should be mandatory, and over whether or not a referendum should be held to approve a new voting system. Nevertheless, two important recommendations that were clear from the respondents were:

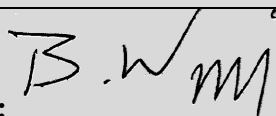
- 1) A majority of respondents wanted Members of Parliament who represent single-member constituencies as is the case now. This desire excludes List-Proportional Representation and Single-Transferable Vote with multi-member constituencies as potential options for a new voting system, and so these options are not recommended for consideration. Alternative voting / ranked ballots would provide an alternative to the FPTP system which would satisfy the desire for a local representative. A Mixed-Member Proportional system would provide the benefits of Proportional Representation while still maintaining single-member constituencies with local representatives and should be considered as an alternative to FPTP.
- 2) Respondents were against on-line voting and wanted voting to take place in person at polling stations as is the case now.

The majority of respondents were in favour of electoral reform; however, a sizable minority of respondents preferred the current FPTP system, and among those who wanted change, there was no consensus regarding what changes should be made. A majority of respondents wanted a system with ridings that elect local representatives.

Report submitted to Special Committee on Electoral Reform (ERRE)

Date: October 13, 2016

MP's signature:



(Name) Borys Wrzesnewskyj

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**Reports must be submitted to the Clerks of the Committee no later than Friday, October 14, 2016 in both official languages.**

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