



DAVID GRAHAM, député

October 14, 2016

Special Committee on Electoral Reform
Submitted electronically
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Dear Members of the Special Committee on Electoral Reform,

Pursuant to the motion adopted on the 7th of June creating the Special Committee on Electoral Reform and the associated public consultations on the question of electoral reform, I am writing to provide you the results of our consultations in the riding of Laurentides—Labelle.

The riding of Laurentides—Labelle is very large, some 40 times the size of the Island of Montreal, with 43 municipalities and a population that cannot realistically attend only one or two public town-halls. Our internet service is among the worst in Canada and would not provide an equal opportunity for residents to participate. We therefore decided to conduct our consultations in a manner equitable to all residents, regardless of geography, economic condition, or technological capacity, by traditional mail through the use of a householder.

Our householder was sent to all residents of Laurentides—Labelle and addressed several government consultations currently in progress. It was distributed at the beginning of September, 2016. Electoral reform was clearly addressed in the tear-off response card with free return postage. The question we asked was:

CONSULTATIONS

The government wants your opinion on how you see electoral reform. Select multiple choices where appropriate for a mixed system:

- The current system** (the candidate with the most votes wins)
- A preferential ballot** (2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. choices are counted until one candidate has obtained a majority of the votes)
- Proportional representation** (votes apply to political parties directly, not to local candidates)
- Voting** should be **mandatory**
- It is **up to** our MPs in **parliament** to do the research and choose the best options
- I don't know and I want to learn more

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On this question, we received 86 responses:

- (29) The current system
- (15) A preferential ballot
- (32) Proportional representation
- (37) Voting should be mandatory
- (7) It is up to our MPs in parliament to do the research and choose the best options
- (11) I don't know and I want to learn more

Of these responses, 2 suggested a mixed system between the current system and preferential voting, a combination that is not altogether clear. Three suggested a mixed system between the current system and proportional representation. Two suggested a mixed system between preferential and proportional.

By percentage, we therefore have:

- (27.9 %) The current system
- (2.3 %) A mixed current-preferential system
- (3.5 %) Mixed current-system proportional
- (12.8 %) Pure preferential
- (2.3 %) Preferential mixed with proportional
- (31.4 %) Pure proportional
- (43.0 %) Mandatory voting
- (8.1 %) Up to MPs
- (12.8 %) Do not know and want to learn more

In the comments section, several expanded on their responses, and a single person expressed their desire never to have voting be mandatory. We received no comments regarding the need for a referendum to put in place any changes. Support for mandatory voting was very high.

Of 74,400 householders sent for this consultation, our response rate is around 0.11%, or about 11 responses per ten thousand. Of those who expressed an opinion, we did not find any consensus, but it is clear that there are not tremendous objections to the current system in our riding. 40 responses, or 46.5%, prefer systems that result in a single representative (either the current system or preferential balloting) against 32 responses, or 37.2%, which would like a partially or completely proportional system. 14, or 16.2%, did not express a preference. The priority is, therefore, to keep one MP per riding, and one riding per MP, whether it is under single-member plurality or any of the large variety of preferential systems.

As the MP for a riding larger than around a hundred countries, I must also express my concern on a couple of points that concern me regarding electoral reform.

First, I do not accept any system that creates two classes of MPs: those who have a riding, and those who do not. We are accountable to our ridings first and foremost, and a system that puts more emphasis on parties at the expense of the daily issues facing our citizens is not acceptable. Therefore, should we move toward a system where a portion of MPs do not have ridings and are chosen purely by their ridings, those MPs will not serve any purpose whatsoever, and their existence serves to dilute the voices of those who do. We might as well simply give whips weighted votes to achieve the same result — which would open a whole different can of worms.

Second, my riding is enormous, at 19,694 square kilometres with some 43 municipalities. For any proportional system, still larger ridings would necessarily need to be created by combining existing ridings. In Laurentides—Labelle, we have 20 communities of under 1,000 residents, and 2 that have fewer than 100 residents.

If rural ridings are combined, the concentration of MPs would accumulate in cities where the majority of voters reside. Thus small communities, which are trying to be heard, will surely lose their voices in many cases. If we combine Laurentides—Labelle, for example, with the neighbouring ridings of Pontiac and Argenteuil—La Petite Nation, we would find ourselves with a riding of 55,692 square kilometres with 128 municipalities, of which one is Gatineau.

If, instead, we reunited the ridings of the administrative region of the Laurentians, the riding would touch Laval at one end and Parent at the other, and would have over a half-million residents across 76 municipalities. Distant communities would not stand a chance (or very very slight) of being seen or heard by one of the six MPs, who would currently represent the ridings of Laurentides—Labelle, Rivière-du-Nord, Argenteuil—La Petite Nation, Mirabel, Sainte-Thérèse-de-Blainville, and Rivière-des-Milles-Îles, who would be competing with each other in the more populated areas. Therefore, proportional systems create a particular danger for rural ridings.

In considering the question of electoral reform, I ask that you pay special attention to the needs of rural Canada, and not only to those of our urban centres.

Thank you for your work and good luck.



DAVID GRAHAM, MP
Laurentides—Labelle